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in Belgium

The Dutch-language theatre

ITS ORIGIN

In all countries where the drama had an early start, it owed its origin to ritual acts or religious ceremonies, as was the case in Greece, India and Japan. The same process took place in the Flemish country (i.e. the Dutch-speaking area of Belgium), where the theatre owed its roots to religion.

The rich and varied rites of Christianity, which penetrated deeply in the low-lying regions of the Scheldt and the Meuse, provided the subject matter for visual presentations of dogmas and especially of facts and tales culled from the Christian faith. As the bulk of the population was still illiterate, it was more susceptible to pictures than words, and the first drama was performed in church. The pictorial factor was predominant, and continued to influence theatrical life for centuries.

In one of the oldest documents known to us, the «*Concordia Regularis*», drawn up by the Bishop of Winchester in the second half of the 11th century, Flanders was rightly described as the cradle of liturgical drama.

None of the texts of this embryonic theatre have survived, not even from the time when performances began to take place in the public square instead of in the church itself. But for very few exceptions, the first and only source of information are the old 14th and 15th century municipal records, in which any money spent for these performances was carefully noted.

In addition to the holy Christmas and Easter plays, there were countless performances devoted to the Virgin Mary. However, the only ones known to us are «*De Zeven Brusselse Bliscappen*» (The seven joys of Brussels), of which only two texts have survived : «*De Eerste Bliscap*» (The first joy) and «*De Zeven-de Bliscap*» (The seventh joy). A great many miracle plays and lives of saints also began to appear. The performances were held at street corners or in the course of religious processions. Most of the time they were inspired by local cults or legends.

Only some of the «miracle plays», which were also called «mysteries» have come down to us. One of them has remained part of the popular repertoire from the 15th century until the present day : it is «*Mariken van Nieumeghen*» (Mary of Nijmegen). Both by the content (the play shows the victory of the worship of Mary over the devil) and by the lively pace of the plot, this miracle play was a forerunner of the Renaissance, thanks to the vivid portraiture of the characters, who stand out as flesh and blood creatures. The work, which could well pass for an early Faustian drama, has survived every change in theatrical fashion and is still being performed. The first printing of «*Mariken van Nieumeghen*» dates from 1518, but despite much research, the name of the author is still unknown.

«*Elckerlyc*» (Everyman), which has been the subject of much discussion, is of more universal interest, even though it is more primitive in form. Hugo von Hofmannstahl's German adaptation of this play, called «*Jederman*», is still performed every year at Salzburg. In 1910, an American University professor, Francis Wood,

put an end to the debate as to whether «Elckerlyc» was of Flemish or English origin. After a learned comparison of the two texts, Professor Wood proved that «Everyman» is in fact a fairly poor translation of the original Flemish «Elckerlyc», which is believed to be the work of Petrus Dorlandus.

«Elckerlyc» is a morality play, a form that was also known as «battement» or «esbattement». These were secular plays of a didactic character, which used allegory to express specific ideas. In them abstract concepts such as death, love, virtue, etc., were depicted as actual characters.

In the play, God calls on «Elckerlyc», man, to account for himself. He has given thought only to earthly nourishments and is surrounded by friends and flatterers, but when death turns up he is abandoned by all, with the sole exceptions of virtue and knowledge.

The problems of death and the hereafter were and still are constant factors in the Flemish drama.

THE «ABELE SPELEN» OR «NOBLE PLAYS»

The first example of secular theatre transposing the framework of religious drama, was discovered much later, at the beginning of the 19th century, by Hoffman von Fallern in a manuscript called the «Hulthemse Handschrift» (Hulthem manuscript). Charles Hulthem was a Ghent magistrate. The manuscript consisted of poetry, prose and drama. The four plays discovered in this way, which immediately aroused considerable interest, were given the name «abele spelen» or «noble plays». It is supposed that the word «abele» used in the manuscript was intended to mean noble or distinguished. These «abele spelen» are a unique phenomenon in European medieval literature. They are closely related to the knightly epics and date from the first half of the 15th century. The author's name is unknown.

Except for «Vanden Winter ende Vanden mer» (Of Winter and Summer) which is a poetical but also instructive allegory, the other plays «Lanselot» (Lancelot), «Esmoreit» and «Ciriant» are romantic dramas in which the subject is handled in a psychological and somewhat melodramatic manner. This again is one of the constant factors in Flemish drama literature. Honour and the sating of passion, love and happiness threatened by the social gulf which separates the lovers, these are the subjects of «Lanselot» which is without a doubt the best constructed and most frequently performed of these works. The struggle for

independent life which has to be waged against the adversities of fate is in itself a theme of unquestionable dramatic force.

In addition to the «abete spelen», many popular farces or «cluyten» have been preserved, and these faithfully reproduce the atmosphere and mentality of the time. They are short, somewhat archaic sketches but full of colour and movement, and they are still acceptable to present-day audiences. But they are a naive, poignant genre, rather than humorous. The best known of these short plays are «De Busken-blazor» (The blower's farce) and «Drie Daghe Horen» (A lord for three days).

I am looking for any further description of the many works which constitute the ancient history of the Flemish theatre. But as we have shown, the old Flemish drama has produced some extremely important plays which, furthermore, have successfully withstood the test of time. Even today, they are the pride of the Dutch language drama: in none of the neighbouring countries of Europe is there any equivalent of the «abete spelen».

THE RHETORICIANS

From a sociological point of view, the ensuing period was of the utmost importance for the Dutch-language area of Belgium. For centuries the country had known nothing but war and foreign occupation. From a general theatrical point of view the period was less interesting, but the new movement in the Dutch-language area consisted of the Rhetoricians, of whom the many amateur theatrical companies to be found in Flanders nowadays are the direct descendants.

In some municipal records of the second half of the 15th century, the earlier description of «Theatrical companions» has been replaced by «Rhetorical companions». It can therefore be assumed that this roughly was the period when the Rhetorical Chambers were first formed. The example for them came from Provence, where companies had been formed to promote poetry, but they were also inspired by the «puys d'amour» in the north of France.

The Rhetoricians' aims were similar, but their main concern was with dramatic art. They were often asked to enliven popular celebrations by means of picturesque pageants.

They were used in an almost official manner and, in addition, the Rhetoricians received from the municipal authorities a «charter» listing their rights, and duties. The «Geselschap van den Fonteine» (The Fountain company), of Ghent, was one of the earliest of these companies and subsequently became the principal Chamber of Flemish Rhetoricians.



Performance of «Gloriant»
by the students of the
«Herman Teirlinck Studio».

THE "LANDJUWEELEN" OR DRAMA TOURNAMENT

"Landjuwelen", or drama tournaments, began in the first half of the 16th century. The name "Landjuweel" («juweel» means jewel in Dutch) was derived from the silver trophy which was awarded to the winners, after the practice of contests held previously by the archery companies. A company which wanted to organize a "Landjuweel" had to apply for the privilege to the authorities, and then invited companies from other areas to participate, informing them of the theme of the play that would constitute the test. The play was specially written for the occasion by the "factor", or writer attached to the companies participating in the tournament. The host company held a meeting celebration lasting several days, and the results were announced with great ceremony.

Between 1426 and 1565 there appear to have been no fewer than a hundred and thirty-five such tournaments, although only seven "Landjuweel" are known to have occurred as a ceremony: organized by the Rhetoricians the first of these took place in Malines in 1515, the last in Antwerp in 1561. Some "esbattements" or "battlements" and several farces from these "Landjuwelen", have survived, but as literary texts they are of historical value only.

Going to the 16th century tradition, King Leopold in 1922 restored the "Landjuweel", as an encouragement to amateur theatricals in the language (see further).

The foregoing has clearly shown the existence of constant factors in Flemish drama.

What did the Rhetoricians perform?

At first, chiefly miracle plays, the lives of saints and "mysteries", which closely resembled those of the Middle Ages. But the Rhetoricians also performed morality plays and even ventured into secular drama, but this did not enjoy a great following. Two such dramas which have survived are "Florysse ende Blancheflere" (Florice and Blanchefleur) and, especially, "Spieghel der Minne" (The mirror of love), by Colijn van Rijsselse. Both the content and the didactical manner of this romantic drama, in the same vein as Romeo and Juliet, are strangely reminiscent of the "noble play" "Lanselot" (Lancelot), mentioned earlier. Originally it consisted of "Zes Battement Spelen" (Six "Battlements"), the complete performance of which was spread over six days. It is the tragic tale of a young man who falls in love with a girl who is his social inferior. Both die the victims of their love.

"Spieghel der Minne" has in recent years been performed by official theatre companies: in 1952 in a version freely adapted by Rik Jacobs; in 1959, in a shorter and more faithful adaptation by Fred Engelen. In both cases "Spieghel der Minne" was seen to be a fine, simple and poetic work showing the influence both of the Rhetoricians and of the Renaissance theatre. During this same period there was no revival of comedy, which remained what it had been in the Middle Ages: it still kept to the same subjects (marital disputes), with the same coarse, popular characterization. The three most representative farces were "De Cluyte van Playerwater" (Playerwater's farce), "Han-

neken Leckertant» (Greedy Annie) and, of course, «*Nu Noch»* (Much more), which is still being performed regularly.

The «chariot plays» also date from this period. Naïve morality plays were performed on carts which either circulated in processions or were incorporated in an «Ommegang» or pageant. These «chariot plays» established close and immediate contact with whatever audience happened to be on the spot.

Whereas these carts and the performances given in them were extremely rudimentary, the sets which were built in the open air for the more important plays, were often extremely spacious and richly decorated.

A PERIOD OF DECLINE

In 1609, after the wars of religion, when the northern Low Countries achieved independence through the Twelve-year Truce concluded with Spain, the southern Low Countries (i.e. the present territory of Belgium) came under the authority of Archduke Albert and Archduchess Isabella, the son-in-law and daughter of Philip II, King of Spain. While the north turned Calvinist, the south remained Catholic, with the sole exception of a small minority of supporters of the Reformation. These often emanated from the Chambers of Rhetoric, with the result that further performances by these companies were prohibited. This caused large numbers of

intellectuals, including many playwrights, to leave the southern Low Countries and to settle in the north. It was in this way that the south lost the great writer Vondel, who was of Flemish origin.

At a time when new trends were emerging everywhere and new dramatic forms were taking shape, the Dutch-language area of Belgium was silenced. This lethargy was no accident, and continued for over three centuries. This small country, which had in the past been the cradle of a promising culture, was stifled by the wars of religion, and the sequels of this asphyxia continued to be felt until the 20th century.

When the modern drama began to take shape in the west, therefore, Flanders was still reduced to silence. The eminence it had formerly enjoyed was a thing of the past. As already explained, this state of affairs was due to the emigration of intellectuals to the northern Low Countries, to the authorities' distrust of the Chambers of Rhetoric, and also to the fact that owing to an almost permanent state of war the country had been untouched by the evolution of the theatre in Europe.

Since the Middle Ages, the theatre had been an art to be enjoyed by the whole of the community. In the 18th century however, the position changed completely. The upper classes began to give favour to theatres built in the Italian manner, while the common people continued to prefer the far less sophisticated open-air plays which were performed at fairs and kermises. This not only enhanced the division of society into different classes, but also influenced dramatic literature, which ceased to have any direct bearing on the masses. Pride

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As were the days when theatres were going

in cities throughout the whole of Western

Europe. In Brussels, foreign companies often

flared up again repeatedly in the Flemish

too suffered great damage. During the pro-

cess of reconstruction, a new hall was offered

the city's theatrical companies. The «Grand

«Palais» was built on the site of the present

«Palais Theatre, and it was used mostly for

a new genre that was just emerging.

the Twelve-year Truce, the Chambers of

Rhetoric resumed their activities, but these

not experimental in character.

the dramatic art of these troubled times, few

emerged and there were hardly any

of real value. One name which has sur-

is that of the Dunkirk Rhetorician Michiel

Swaen (1654-1707). His Bruegel-like farce

«De Gecroonde Leerse» (The crowned boot),

is based on a tale involving Charles the

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THE REIGN OF MOLIERE AND VOLTAIRE

Classicism and the Renaissance had had little

effect on Flemish dramatic writing. Conversely

even greater authority was enjoyed by religious

literature and, at the other end of the scale, by

popular and peasant literature. In addition, the

Spanish domination introduced the country to

cloak and dagger melodrama which continued

to influence Dutch-language playwrights in

Belgium until quite recently. In matters of the

theatre, the 18th century proved to be an al-

most slavish copy of the previous century, but

became perhaps even more decadent. The

Rhetoricians had turned into chronic drunkards

far more intent on merry-making than on culti-

vating the mind. The gulf between the different

classes became even deeper, and more and

more attention came to be paid to the indivi-

dual. There were no more open-air performan-

thern Low Countries and at the same time brought a respite to those Chambers of Rhetoric which still existed. King William I of the Netherlands granted them his special protection. The custom of allowing certain theatrical companies to describe themselves as «royal» first appeared at this time and was afterwards continued by the Belgian Sovereigns. Until the eve of the Revolution of 1830, which again separated the two countries, the King of the Netherlands supported and protected all Dutch-language artistic ventures. Although this did not lead immediately to the creation of an original repertoire, this policy did mark the beginnings of a trend that was to prove extremely favourable to the drama in Flanders.

INDEPENDENT BELGIUM

After Belgian independence in 1830, the Dutch-language troupes in Belgium encountered new obstacles, for they were accused of having served the Calvinistic Netherlands. The upper classes of newly independent Belgium were not only French-speaking but were wholly French-oriented, and ignored the very existence of Dutch.

As soon as the revolution was over, young intellectuals who had been wholly educated in Dutch under the previous regime — something that was no longer possible in the new Belgian state — set to work. And soon the theatrical companies were reverting to secular tradition.

Ghent set off first, as early as 1833. This city was to be the birthplace of a writer who, within the framework of the Belgian State, was destined to breathe new life into the Flemish drama and to lay the foundations for its subsequent development. He was a doctor, Hippoliet Van Peene (1811-1864), whose wife, an actress of considerable merit, was well known in Gent theatrical circles. Hippoliet Van Peene provided her with custom-made parts in some sixty different plays.

In October 1853, Antwerp too acquired its own troupe, thanks to the efforts of a talented actor, Viktor Driessens. But it was not until 1874 that the city had its own Dutch-language theatre. As this building has now been demolished, the Antwerp troupe has for thirty years been performing at the Theatre Royal, the former French Opera house.

In 1887 an official Flemish theatre was inaugu-

held in Brussels and, in 1889, Ghent acquired

it too.

None of the authors of this period deserve to be remembered, but nowadays their names can rarely be seen on the billboards. They are *Victor de Tièr* (1856-1920) who produced a number of plays that could be classified as "antic realism"; *Lodewyck Scheltjens* (1861-1945) whose uncomplicated drama is fraught with social implications; *Albrecht Rodenbach* (1856-1880) and *Alfred Hegenscheidt* (1860-1951), two writers of lyrical, historical and tragic plays and, lastly, *Father Cyriel Verhaeve* (1874-1949), who wrote emphatic historical dramas.

The great and famous naturalist novelist *Cyril Bussé* (1859-1932) also wrote a number of plays for the theatre, including an extremely good tragic-comic one-act play, «*Sususususut*», caricature exposing the Flemish villagers' lack of spiritual life. *Cyril Bussé* was the writer of a play which is still very popular, «*Gezin van Paemel*» (The van Paemel Family), a touching reminiscence of the early days of socialism. The action takes place in a peasant family whose members work like slaves. *Van Peene* provided parts in some sixty different plays of a talented actor, *Raf Verhulst* (1866-1941) were very foreign to them.

Van Peene acquired its own home in 1874 that had been demolished, the building having been purchased by the former French *Hippolyte Hippo*, theatre was inaugu-

These measures undoubtedly stimulated the zeal of Flemish writers, despite the fact that their work rarely stood up to comparison with that of their foreign contemporaries. The Dutch-language drama in Belgium was developing quantitatively, but not yet qualitatively. Historical romantic drama, which aimed to awaken the national conscience, dominated the dramatic repertoire, and matters remained thus until the middle of the 20th century.

It was only towards the year 1880 that, thanks to a higher level of civilization, greater freedom of opinion, the growing interest of the intellectuals, and thanks also to the awarding of prizes, to the stature of the three companies of professional actors (in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent) and to the creation of courses in dramatic art, the theatrical level in Flanders began to improve substantially, thus laying the foundation for the decisive impetus it was to enjoy almost fifty years later.

Oscar De Gruyter (1885-1929) the man who gave the Flemish theatre its first stimulus, was a Flemish university graduate — a rare thing at that time — and held a doctorate in Germanic Philology.

Oscar De Gruyter as a theatrical promotor, and *Herman Teirlinck* (see anon) as a playwright, may together be regarded as the pioneers of the Belgian contemporary theatre in Dutch.

The Belgian government initiated a policy (which it still pursues) of granting official awards, Triennial Prizes in particular, to Dutch-language dramatic authors. In 1859, the State was awarded for the first time, to Hippolyte Hippo,

THE PIONEER : OSCAR DE GRUYTER

In Ghent in 1908, the theatrical enthusiast and idealist Oscar De Gruyter founded the «Vlaamse Vereniging voor Toneel- en Voordrachtkunst» (Flemish Association for Dramatic Art and Elocution). The first title in its repertoire was «*Starkadd*», the only masterpiece written by Alfred Hegenscheidt. This play reflected the views of De Gruyter himself, who wanted language to be fine and beautiful. «*Starkadd*» responded entirely to this ideal. The play was later revived repeatedly, in different circumstances. In the last year of the 1914-1918 war, De Gruyter succeeded in forming a theatrical company to entertain Flemish troops on the Yser front. This group was called «*Het Fronttoneel*» (The theatre at the front) and this is the name under which it has gone down in history. Its official title however was «*Vlaamse Afdeling van de Schouwburg der Koningin*» (Flemish Section of the Queen's Theatre). This was a remarkable venture as in the Belgian army at that time, Dutch was not in use as an official language.

Oscar De Gruyter never included superficial or purely entertaining works in his repertoire. On the contrary, one of the plays he put on was «*Warenar*», a classical comedy by Hooft, a playwright from the northern Netherlands.

The great offensive prior to the Armistice put a temporary stop to the work of the «Fronttoneel», but it survived after the end of the war. It went on tour in Flanders with a repertoire including «*Starkadd*» and other plays, until De Gruyter was demobilized. Then the «Front-

toneel» obtained permission to perform for the Belgian soldiers stationed in occupied German territory.

The relatively ephemeral existence of the «Fronttoneel» nevertheless formed the embryo of the rebirth which ultimately enabled the Dutch-language theatre in Belgium, and literature too, to embark on a promising new phase. A year after leaving the army Oscar De Gruyter founded «*Het Vlaamse Volkstoneel*» (The Flemish Popular Theatre). The company included Staf Bruggen, a former prisoner of war and graduate of the School of Dramatic Art, who later became the idol of Flemish audiences. The aim of the «*Vlaamse Volkstoneel*» was to assemble a company that would be more demanding and ambitious than the existing official theatres.

De Gruyter was so keen that he resigned from the professorship he held in Ghent. Above all he wanted to raise the Flemish theatre to the European level. In addition to the works of Sophocles, Goethe and Shaw, his repertoire also included original plays. The «*Volkstoneel*» which also performed in Holland, succeeded in attracting mass audiences as well as intellectuals.

This lasted until 1922. At that time, Oscar De Gruyter was appointed Director of the «Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg» (Royal Dutch language theatre) or K.N.S., in Antwerp. He remained in this post until his early death, in Nice in 1929. Thanks to his efforts, this company became the most important in the country, comparable to the best European companies. Oscar De Gruyter altered the repertoire, renovated the actors' style, and attached prime importance to language. Long after De Gruyter

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«Scenes from the life of Saint Francis», a play staged in 1928 by the «Vlaamse Volkstoneel».

ter's death, the «Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg» was still benefiting from his teachings and achievements. De Gruyter's dream, one that was also cherished by Herman Teirlinck, — the creation of a National Theatre — did not materialize until 1946.

HET VLAAMSE VOLKSTONEEL

«Het Vlaamse Volkstoneel» (Flemish Popular Theatre) was not doomed, but it was destined to change course and thus to render even greater services to the cause of a revival in the Flemish theatre, which henceforth attained European stature. What did this new spirit consist of ? Oscar De Gruyter's successor, the Dutch director John de Meester junior, gave the «Vlaamse Volkstoneel» a Catholic emphasis. In his view, the drama was not meant to serve literature but should, on the contrary, break away from literature through the medium of the avant-garde theatre. To this end, he adapted the theories of Tairoff and Meyerhold to his own views.

In 1924, the reorganized «Vlaamse Volkstoneel» reopened with the miracle play «Mariken van Nieumeghen» (Mary of Nijmegen).

The company performed large numbers of plays from Dutch literature, including some from mediaeval times and from the era of the Chambers of Rhetoric. But it also performed plays by Flemish authors and modern plays culled from the international repertoire. It sur-

prised its audiences with an entirely new approach to acting, which replaced the old emphasis on words as such by total concentration on rhythm. Producers borrowed techniques from constructivism and from the circus. They wanted at all costs to astound the public, which sometimes protested — though not frequently — against the profanation of all traditions. Many spectators were converted to the ideas of Johan de Meester. Thanks to the press, the new forms he created aroused interest in different European countries and even in America. The «Vlaamse Volkstoneel» went on tour, visiting Holland and Germany ; it even succeeded in rousing the sophisticated Paris critics and audiences when it gave its first performances in the French capital in 1927. At the invitation of Lugné-Poë it performed Vondel's «Lucifer» at the Comédie des Champs-Elysées. Less than a month later, Firmin Gémier invited the company to perform «Lucifer» again in Paris, as part of the International Theatre Festival. Gémier was extremely complimentary in his presentation of the performance. But «Lucifer» was not the only play which the «Vlaamse Volkstoneel» performed in Paris : it also showed «Tijl», a somewhat sarcastic and bitter paraphrase of the Uylenspiegel legend. This was a play that had been written specially for the «Vlaamse Volkstoneel» by Anton Van den Velde, a baroque stylist, who had devised it for the benefit of Johan de Meester.

Two years later, the company was invited to perform before the Royal Family and the Court at Laeken, where French was the dominant language at that time. This was a very unusual event for a Dutch-language company. At Laeken in July 1929 the «Vlaamse Volkstoneel»

with an entirely new style, which replaced the old as such by total concentration. Officers borrowed techniques from the circus casts to astound the public interested — though not frequently — in the profanation of all traditions were converted to the Meester. Thanks to the he created aroused interest in countries and even "Vlaamse Volkstoneel" went to Germany; it even the sophisticated Paris where it gave its first performances capital in 1927. At the time it performed Vondel's "Lucifer" again in International Theatre Festi- vally complimentary in the performance. But "Lucifer" by which the "Vlaamse Volkstoneel" in Paris: it also showed sarcastic and bitter L. Aspergeland legend. This been written specially for "Lucifer" by Anton Van de Velde, who had devised it for the Meester.



«Don Gil de la calzas verdes» by Tirso de Molina, at the «National Toneel».

THE PROMOTOR : HERMAN TEIRLINCK

What else happened between the wars — a period that was so stimulating for the theatre? One name that has already been mentioned, parallel with Oscar De Gruyter, is that of the writer and essayist Herman Teirlinck (1879-1968).

Their careers had been similar in many respects. But Herman Teirlinck had had the good fortune to attract attention with several of his earlier ventures; this good fortune did not come to Oscar De Gruyter, who moreover died too young. Both men had fought for the improvement and refinement of the Dutch language, without however ignoring the valid contribution which the popular dialects represented to the theatre, it was the ideal of both men to achieve the establishment of a Dutch-language National Theatre, together with a training school for actors.

In 1946 Herman Teirlinck, in his capacity as government adviser, was able to watch over the implementation of the idea that was so close to his heart. The role of National Theatre was allotted to the Antwerp company set up by Oscar De Gruyter. But despite the best of intentions, the sole result lay in the allocation of larger state subsidies. And the scheme proved so unproductive that in 1967 the Antwerp «Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg» lost the status of a National Theatre and, to the present day, no further progress has been made in implementing the 1946 decision to create a Dutch-language National Theatre in Belgium. Herman Teirlinck's ideas about actors' training were less disappointing results. A «Studio» was

set up at the same time as the National Theatre to give promising young artists three years of daily tuition in the various theatrical disciplines. After passing their final test, the pupils of this «Studio» may be recruited as professional actors and actresses by various companies.

Herman Teirlinck was a man of many parts. Although he was so active in the theatre, it is perhaps his work as a novelist which will prove the most enduring. Even so he wrote, as early as 1922, an astoundingly advanced play called «De Vertraagde Film» (Slow-motion film). With this play he wanted to put an end, once and for all, to the realism and naturalism that had imprisoned Flemish dramatic writing. He described «De Vertraagde Film» as a «danced, sung and spoken drama» and it reflected the expressionistic spirit which was then building up. Nevertheless Teirlinck's play was still based on melodrama: the story of two lovers who are goaded to suicide by a sequence of trite events. In the brief interval between life and death, the film of their life unfolds in slow motion.

Surprise and admiration were caused by the shape of the play, more than the content. Henceforth Teirlinck was destined to dominate theatrical life in Flanders for over forty years. In the meantime he was appointed adviser to the King and wrote several works in the same vein as «De Vertraagde Film», including an adaptation entitled «Ik dien» (I serve) of the «Beatrijs» legend, an ancient «Marial play», as well as «De Man zonder lijf» (The man without a body) in which he already used the abstract approach to symbolize man's quest for happiness.

He was keenly interested in the evolution of the theatre throughout the world, and compared his own views of the drama with those of Gordon Craig and Stanislavsky. He interpreted their message in the light of his own personal inspiration, both in his essays and in the courses he continued to give until shortly before his death, at an advanced age, at the «Studio» of the «Nationale Toneel», now called the «Herman Teirlinck Studio».

Teirlinck's optics changed repeatedly, both in his theories and in his work. Starting out as a visionary theoretician, faithful to Gordon Craig's acting theories, he later evolved into an ardent exponent of the expressionistic forms of a communal art, and towards the end of his life showed a marked preference for theatre on the monumental scale.

His first period ended in 1937 with the play «*De Ekster op de Galg*» (The magpie on the gallows). This again was a melodrama in which the hero, an old man, relives the collapse of a dream. Herman Teirlinck prepared several plays for special occasions as well as open-air performances ; later he embarked on a synthesis of the classical Greek tragedies. He collected a number of concise texts from which he had eliminated every sign of lyricism, keeping throughout to the bare facts. His last volume, entitled «*Versmoorde Goden*» (The murdered gods) which dates from 1961, contains three monumental works : «*Taco*» an original historical drama, «*Jocaste tegen God*» (Jocasta against God) an unusual interpretation of the tragedy of Oedipus, and «*De Fluitketel*» (The whistling kettle), a drama based on the present-day mentality of young people.

Herman Teirlinck, the prince of Dutch Litera-

ture, was despite his changeable, complex personality, a writer who rendered invaluable services to the cause of Dutch literature general and of the Flemish theatre in particular.

AMATEUR DRAMATICS

In the meantime, amateur companies had been grouped in national federations, which set out with some success to defend their members' interests. The «Nationale Toneelverbond» (National Theatrical Federation) was the first to be established in the year 1908. Although it was in principle free of any religious or political influence, it was in fact of Liberal inspiration. After the second world war, this led to the creation of a new national federation, the «Nationale Vlaams Kristelijk Toneelverbond» (Flemish National Christian Theatrical Federation), or N.V.K.T., which consisted of Catholic theatrical companies. This was followed later by the «Socialistische Toneelfederatie» (Socialist Theatrical Federation), which included the more socially-minded companies. At the present time, some two hundred and fift

ple companies belong to the «Nationale Toneelbond» while the «Nationale Vlaams Christelijke Toneelsilverbond» includes more than six hundred, and the «Socialistische Toneelfederatie» about forty. Allowing also for those which are not affiliated to any national federation, the number of amateur companies in the Flemish area can thus be estimated to amount to about a thousand.

At the insistence of Herman Teirlinck, King Albert I restored the «Landjuwelen», a tradition that dated back to the 16th century. The purpose of this move was to lend amateur theatrical companies new inspiration. Henceforth it was decided to hold the competition every year, and a commission was set up to organize it. King Leopold III, Prince Charles the Prince Regent, and King Baudouin continued to honour the «Landjuwelen» with their patronage. However, owing to the fact that the competition did not take place between the years 1940 and 1947. Nowadays some 150 companies of Flemish amateur actors compete in the «Landjuweel» every year, and first contests are held successively in each of the Dutch-language provinces and in the Flemish area of Brabant.

THE PERIOD OF FOLKLORIC REALISM

Two authors in particular must be mentioned for the period between the two wars. They were still working after 1945, but it was unquestionably before this date that they produced their best plays. Although on the whole they did not pretend to anything more than folkloric realism, they nevertheless enjoyed such a reputation as to be incapable of omission from this enumeration. The first of the two writers, Gaston Martens (1883-1964) became internationally known, thanks to one of his most typically Flemish plays called «Paradijsvogels» (Birds of paradise). This illustrates two constant factors in Flemish life : the inhabitants' combination of naive piety with Bruegel-like excesses. «Paradijsvogels» was first performed in Flanders without achieving any particular success. Perhaps Martens had given his audience too faithful a portrait of his compatriots. However, when the writer emigrated to the South of France during the war, the French translation which he had made of his play came to the notice of the film and theatre people, who were captivated by it. «Paradijsvogels» was shown in Paris and was later made into a film called «Les gueux au paradis», starring Raimu and Fernandel. The French success of the play stirred up curiosity in Flanders and also in overseas countries, including America and Japan. Gaston Martens has written other plays which have not been as widely shown, even though some of them have been performed in France.

Gaston Martens returned to Flanders, and it was only after the second world war that «Paradijsvogels» began to triumph there. It is a pity that his later writing was not of the same calibre.

Jos Janssen (1888-1968) was a contemporary and compatriot of Gaston Martens, and wrote in the same theatrical vein. Even so his works are less religious and less popular in character. Jos Janssen, who wrote plays for an amateur company from West Flanders, also had his work performed by official companies, thanks to his play «De Wonderdoktoor» (The miracle healer). This is a satirical, folkloric and entertaining work in which the playwright ridicules the credulity of certain country people and the charlatan practices of a village healer. Jos Janssen also wrote comedies which are set in small provincial towns, and several historical plays of uneven quality. Thanks to the success of the «Wonderdoktoor» these lesser plays were also performed by the main theatre groups. Jos Janssen however never attained the same international fame as Gaston Martens had achieved.

EXPRESSIONISM AND ROMANTICISM

Mention should also be made of a number other playwrights who were active between the two wars. Like the two authors described above, they also went on writing after the war sometimes in a different form. Ernest Wille Schmidt (1886-1937), should not be omitted even though in practice his work is only performed in Antwerp, because he captivated the official theatrical companies with his well constructed plays, based mostly on actual events occurring in bourgeois families. Paul de Maertelaer (1895-1950), who was disabled during the 1914-18 war, enriched the «Vlaamse Volkstoneel» with an expressionistic drama called «Nueces», which was anti-militarist in inspiration. After this he produced a series of historic dramas and one passion play. After the war he produced simple but well-written provincial comedies entirely devoid of any folkloric element, and these proved successful in the repertoire of the Flemish theatre companies. Willem Putman (1900-1954), a romantic novelist, was also the author of several subtle psychological dramas which the theatrical companies were delighted to include in their repertoire. Frans Demers (1905), formerly a colonial soldier, gave the Dutch-language theatre in Belgium its first «colonial» plays, and they were remarkably good. All are set in Belgium's former African colony, but the emphasis is more on the problem of race relationships than on purely local issues. Lode Cantens (1900-1955) belongs to the same trend, but his romanticism is more ingenuous. He also produced



Een nacht in Paradise» by Gaston Martens.

historical dramas, biblical plays and other plays with fast dialogue.

During the four years of the war, when Belgium was occupied territory, theatrical life continued. There were fewer amateur dramatics during this period, because the «Landjuwelen» had been abolished, but the three official theatres in Antwerp, Brussels and Ghent kept up their performances throughout. A number of younger writers set to work, and these four years, which might have been lost for the theatre, witnessed the creation of several original works in the Dutch language. The German occupation authorities organized a number of performances in their own language, while certain professional companies enjoyed the cooperation of well-known German producers.

In 1945, after the liberation and the ensuing repression of collaborators, most of these companies emerged blameless and it is fair to conclude that theatrical life was by no means at a standstill during the war.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF OFFICIAL COMPANIES

New directors took over. The Ghent Theatre, one of the three official Dutch-language companies, disappeared, and thus the city lost its own troupe. However, as already mentioned, the «Nationale Toneel» was formed in 1946, the benefit of the Antwerp «Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg» which was at that time regarded as the best in the country. Moreover, for political reasons the mission of «National Theatre» was also conferred upon a young amateur company, which was somewhat lacking in experience but rich in zeal, a company which had been touring the Flemish area for several years. It became this company's function to bring quality performances to the remotest provincial areas, where the official companies would be unable to find sufficient well-equipped stages.

This young company, the «Reizend Volksteater» or R.V.T. (Travelling Popular Theatre) performed its task with more zeal than talent. But the interest which it showed in original Dutch language works and the encouragement which it extended to budding young playwrights, constituted an example for its more senior colleagues, the Flemish theatres of Antwerp and Brussels. In 1967, the «Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg» lost its function of «National Theatre» and since then the «Reizend Volksteater» has enjoyed extensive support from the provincial authorities of Antwerp, where it is established. In the years to come the «Reizend Volksteater» will therefore be able to pursue

ever. The Ghent Theatre Social Dutch-language company, and thus the city lost its zeal, as already mentioned, was formed in 1946, Antwerp «Koninklijke Nederlandse» which was at that time still in the country. Moreover, the mission of «Nationale» conferred upon a young which was somewhat out rich in zeal, during the Flemish area became this company's performances to the remote, where the official cor-table to find sufficient

years went by before this efflorescence produced fruits of any note. The new growth was due to the creation of the Nationaal Toneel's «Studio» or «Teirlinck Studio» and to the creation of schools of dramatic art. These various organizations produced so much trained talent that there was an urgent need to media came into being as outlets for the improved communications and more international contacts broadened the and enabled actors to observe how theatre was developing elsewhere. The year began to show. The theatrical critic Jozefeyne is characteristic of the post-war young playwrights, among its more senior co-théâtres of Antwerp and «Koninklijke Nederlandse» function of «Nationale» extensive support from the city of Antwerp, where it is

company, this has since then been the of several performances by the «Nationale» which until 1967 was assimilated to the «Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg».

Brussels, to the «Koninklijke Nederlandse Toneel», the Dutch-language theatre thus enjoyed new growth. Even so, years went by before this efflorescence produced fruits of any note.

The new growth was due to the creation of the Nationaal Toneel's «Studio» or «Teirlinck Studio» and to the creation of schools of dramatic art. These various organizations produced so much trained talent that there was an urgent need to validate use.

Before moving on to the post-war era, i.e. the years since 1945, something should be said about the «Jeugdtheater» (Youth Theatre) of Antwerp, which for many years was a unique phenomenon in the European and even world theatre. The «Jeugdtheater» was a child of the war, even though the occupying power had no hand in its inception.

It was a young actor, Fred Engelen, who died prematurely in 1968, who was responsible during the war years for the creation, as a private venture, of a theatrical company for young people. Engelen had worked as a producer for the «Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg» and later became director of the Nationaal Toneel's «Studio», which had just been set up. More than fifteen years after the war, he and his wife, the actress Tina Balder, left for South Africa; he was anxious to help develop the drama in a country where a language closely akin to Dutch is spoken. However, the real initiator of the youth theatre was Joris Diels, who was at that time the director of the «Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg» in Antwerp. Thanks to his organizational talent and to his thorough knowledge of the problems of the theatre, he was usually regarded as the most qualified successor to Oscar De Gruyter. After the war, Joris Diels and his wife, the talented actress Ida Wasserman, emigrated to the Netherlands, where both are now working in one of the leading companies. It was Joris Diels who put Fred Engelen in charge of the «Jeugdtheater», the expenses of

which were not covered by any subsidies. But the aim of the venture was to familiarize young people with the theatre, and thus to prepare future generations of regular and enlightened theatre-goers.

This paedagogic aim was maintained when, after the liberation, the «Jeugdteater» was turned into an official theatre subsidized chiefly by the Antwerp city authorities but by other official bodies too.

Corry Lievens was put in charge, and she worked tirelessly for more than twenty years, devoting her incomparable paedagogic and artistic talents to the venture. In 1956 she visited the U.S.A., to give talks about this minor but unusual aspect of theatrical life.

The performances of the «Jeugdteater» are not by child actors but by professionals who present plays written specially for young audiences. It was here that many budding Flemish playwrights first had their works performed in public. The company presents three or four shows per week, and each play runs for about two weeks.

As to the length of the youth theatre season, this is the same as that of official theatres. Members of the «Jeugdteater» enjoy virtually the same terms and conditions of employment as those of other professional companies.

The Antwerp «Jeugdteater», which has different sets for each of the plays it performs, naturally has a cyclical repertoire since its audience turn-over is so fast. Its performances met a need that had not yet been filled elsewhere.

NEW THEATRES

It was not until 1950, when the first of the «Studio» pupils embarked on their careers, that the process of rejuvenation, renewal and development began to come to fruition in the Dutch language theatre in Belgium. The first crops of drama students were not all recruited by official theatres, and those who succeeded in obtaining a contract often came up against mentalities and attitudes which their youthful outlook found it difficult to accept.

The repertoire struck them as antiquated and as being out of touch with, if not entirely divorced from, recent theatrical trends. Experimental plays were at that time being performed throughout Western Europe, and the young generation of actors and producers were eager to introduce a new repertoire, which stood little chance of proving acceptable to the traditional theatres. In particular, they questioned established acting methods which counter to their own youthful dynamism and progressive ideas.

Thus began a process which had until then seemed wholly utopian, especially in the Dutch language area of Belgium. Armed only with their own restricted means and burning with a desire to provide that which the Flemish theatre lacked. Small theatres began to spring up in attics, private rooms or cellars, wherever there was a small space in which they could vent their love for the stage. Countless new companies were formed, without financial help and without proper equipment. They performed in small halls, which made

to accommodate audiences of only a hundred people, or even less. At the beginning, prospects were nil; but Flanders was discovering a new theatrical universe which had until then been concealed by the silent conspiracy of the official companies. In the early days, actors earned nothing at all. The smaller companies consisted of no more than a few professional actors, whose efforts were complemented whenever necessary by gifted members of the local amateur groups, which began to see their ranks sadly depleted. The new troupe were called «semi-professional» owing chiefly to their heterogeneous membership.

This type of company soon came to be known as Flanders as «chamber theatre» despite the fact that mostly they performed in attics or cellars. It was thanks to them that sympathetic audiences came to know Eugene Ionesco, Samuel Beckett, Arthur Adamov as well as other, revolutionary writers. Although audiences were not won over immediately to this new, amazingly absurd type of play, which they often found incomprehensible at first hearing, they were keenly interested in the young generation of playwrights and in their bold ventures.

In this way Dutch-speaking Belgians were endeavoring to establish contact with the trends that were emerging abroad, and this they achieved by importing the works of playwrights who were making a name for themselves in other countries.

GHENT : THE FIRST STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Oddly enough, although Ghent was at that time without a professional company of its own (but received frequent visits from the Antwerp «Nationale Toneel») it was in the year 1950 the first city to have an enterprising young company, called «Arca Kelderteater» (the Arca Basement theatre). This company was the offshoot of an active and stimulating local drama school. For many years it had the most advanced repertoire imaginable, and although since 1965 Ghent has again had its own professional company, the «Arca-Kelderteater» still survives. It was this company in fact which, in 1965, provided the official theatre with its first director and most of its best actors.



«Thyestes», a play by Hugo Claus
first performed by «Toneel Vlaanderen»

UNIVERSITY IN BRUSSELS

After Ghent, Brussels too acquired its «chamber theatre», under the impetus of a group of gifted young people, most of them university students. Unfortunately this company only lasted a few years. Much later, in 1965, another «chamber theatre» was formed by a very Catholic producer who also taught drama. The company adopted its own personal somewhat literary style, and performed avant-garde plays.

With the support of the Ministry of Culture another Dutch-language theatre opened in the capital city, despite the fact that French is the language most widely spoken there. The «Beursschouwburg» was intended initially to be used solely as the venue for the Flemish theatrical companies visiting Brussels, and mostly these companies paid a part of the expenses. At present, however, it appears that the «Beursschouwburg» is about to form its own troupe, specializing in chamber theatre.

The company called «Toneel Vandaag» (Theatre today) no longer exists, but should nevertheless be mentioned here. It was an amateur company from Brussels, and its actors were keen exponents of everything that was new and bold in the theatre. They were particularly interested in the often eccentric experiments that the young Dutch playwrights were conducting at the time. Rudi van Vlaenderen, the founder and director of «Toneel Vandaag», is now the director of the «Rijks Instituut voor Toneel en Cultuursprei-

ding», or R.I.T.C.S. (Higher National Institute for Theatrical Art and Culture).

This is a higher educational establishment designed to train young people for a whole range of activities connected with the theatre or kindred disciplines.

It was «Toneel Vandaag» which initiated the organization in Brussels of «Middagen van Toneel» (Lunchtime theatre). These «Middagen van Toneel» were aimed chiefly at bringing the latest theatrical trends to the notice of office workers and civil servants during their luncheon interval.

EQUALLY INTENSE ACTIVITY IN ANTWERP

In 1953, Antwerp followed suit with the creation of the «Teater op Zolder» (The Attic Theatre) which, under its present name of «Nederlands Kamertoneel» (Dutch language Chamber Theatre) has become a professional company. The «Nederlands Kamertoneel» is able not only to compete with the three official establishments but is in fact fulfilling a dual function. Under its second name, of «Groot Limburgs Toneel» (Great Limburg Theatre) it has a permanent base at the theatre of the city of Maastricht, in Holland, providing both the Belgian and Dutch regions of Limburg with top-level performances by professional actors. The Belgian province of Limburg had until then been sadly deprived of this kind of performance. As the «Nederlands Kamertoneel», the company continues at the same time, to provide top-grade and highly successful entertainment. There were several changes of management and repertoire between the early days when the company used to act in a bohemian attic, the time when it moved to a mini-theatre in the heart of Antwerp, and the moment when it settled in a spacious, well equipped hall. The repertoire ranged from the avant-garde to the popular, leading subsequently to a more balanced choice of works, with a preponderance of contemporary plays. Thanks to its high standards, the «Nederlands Kamertoneel», which, as we have seen, is also the «Groot Limburgs Toneel», can be rated as one of the best Belgian theatrical companies performing in the

Dutch language, and it receives financial support from both Holland and Belgium. At the same time as «chamber theatres» were springing up, a number of young authors, who will be mentioned further on, were also writing their first plays.

After the first venture of the «Nederlands Kamertoneel», Antwerp was able to welcome new members of the «chamber theatre» family : «De Experimentele Werkgroep voor Toneel» (The Experimental Theatre), which was launched in 1959, and which concentrates on the «theatre of the absurd» and stark productions. Because of its boldness, the merits of this group have not always been properly recognized, but it has benefited from the active understanding of one of the Antwerp municipal authorities. «De Experimentele Werkgroep voor Toneel» has now become a suburban theatre with a more eclectic but still original repertoire.

The «Fakkeltreter» (Torch theatre) is another theatrical venture which took root in the of Antwerp. It had started as an amateur group consisting mainly of teachers. Proud of the fact that it has attained truly professional standards, the «Fakkeltreter» openly admits its committed company. Preferably its programmes consist of socially significant plays, democratic and humanistic in inspiration. But in order to balance its budget, it does from time to time present plays which are straightforward entertainment. The young intellectuals formed the «Fakkeltreter» set out to fill a gap in Flemish theatrical life and to present a message. In this they have succeeded and they are working as hard now as they did in the past.

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the other companies already mentioned, also go on tour, and the «Fakkelteater» is the only company which was bold enough to perform «The Vicar» by Hochhuth, in the Flemish area.

The «Laboratorium voor Vlaams Toneel» (Experimental centre for the Flemish theatre), another Antwerp venture, did not prove long-lived and only survived for two years. It aimed to produce only original works by Dutch-language playwrights, preferably novices. Its early demise was due in part to insufficient outside help and also to a certain lack of vigour and internal organization.

FURTHER GROWTH IN THE PROVINCES

Ghent, Brussels and Antwerp, modest provincial companies began to emerge in provincial cities too: at Courtrai, the «Antigone» (Antigone Theatre) founded in 1955 concentrates in particular on theatre in English; in Bruges, the «Korrekelderteater» (Chamber theatre) is at present working in cooperation with the «Arca-Kelderteater». Elsewhere in Malines, the «Mechels Miniaturtheater» (Malines Miniature Theatre) which also in 1956, sprang from a school of drama, thanks to the initiative of a talented actor and producer, Luc Philips, who gave one of the courses in the local school. This is all. Other provincial cities too were to witness the proliferation of «chamber thea-

tres» but the small companies formed there were mostly short-lived, either because the promoters were lacking in perseverance and drive, or because they could not command sufficient material support to survive.

VERENIGING VAN VLAAMSE TONEELAUTEURS

One event was particularly decisive in the renovation process of the Flemish theatre. In 1956, there was a complete change in the association which Nestor de Tièrè had set up at the beginning of the century and which was called «Bond van Vlaamse Toneelschrijvers» (Union of Flemish Playwrights). Under its new name of «Vereniging van Vlaamse Toneelauteurs» (Association of Flemish Playwrights), the association set itself a number of new targets which can be summed up as follows: preserving friendship and solidarity between its members, developing and promoting their artistic, moral and material interests, encouraging original drama in the Dutch language and, lastly, enhancing the influence of this language. Members were invited to submit their works to a selection and advisory committee which was formed within the Association. This commission consisted of authoritative critics who had no ties with the Association itself, and were empowered to issue a binding favourable opinion. Such a decision then led the Association to ensure that the play which the Com-

mission had approved, was put into production by a professional company. «*Tee drinken*» (While drinking tea), by Jan Christiaens, was one such work. Others soon followed. This system was later taken over, in modified form, by the Ministry of Culture. At the beginning there were about eighty members in the Association. Far more applied, but not always successfully.

The Association of Flemish Playwrights also gave as much financial support as possible to the organization of play-writing competitions. It assisted amateur companies which showed an interest in original Flemish works. More recently, contact was established with Dutch playwrights, leading to useful talks and valuable collaboration. One patronage prize, which is awarded annually, now goes alternately to a Flemish and a Dutch writer.

GREAT STRIDES

It is no exaggeration to say that after 1945 to be more exact, after 1950, Flemish theatre life, under the impetus of bold and talented enthusiasts who had begun their work in the theatre between the wars, blossomed as never had in the past.

The professional theatre was changing and developing, but not always to the advantage of Flemish playwrights, whose works often met with the authorities' indifference. Foreign playwrights were often invited to stage plays for Belgian companies performing in Dutch, and thus exposed their concepts of stagecraft to the test. This came not only from Holland and France, but also from Britain, Germany and even Czechoslovakia and Russia.

By the same token, Flemish stage directors went to stage plays abroad, mainly in Holland and Germany but also in Britain and South America.

After 1955, Flemish actors gradually began to leave Belgium to settle in Holland, and this exodus assumed such proportions that certain measures were taken to stem the flow.

The growth of the Dutch-language theatre in Belgium naturally had a beneficial effect on Flemish dramatic writing. In this field too, the policy of cultural exchange with foreign countries yielded substantial results. Particular interest was shown in the American theatre which was experimenting with new forms. Techniques borrowed from the cinema, including the flash-back, lent the plays new dimensions, and were eagerly welcomed. Neo-

poetry theatre and a revised type of *sit-from-life* play, without beginning or end, like a passing glance through a window, were all styles that had a following in Flanders. There was a vogue for plays with a message or plays on audacious subjects.

While amateur dramatics, which had such a great past, were suffering somewhat unforseen repercussions from the evolution in the field. The amateur companies lost many actors as well as some of their audiences because the professional companies had already expanded their repertoires.

The amateur tradition however was strong enough to enable them to weather the crisis, though some companies broke up or merged. They realized that the standard of performances had to be raised, that techniques had to be brought up to date and productions had to meet stringent conditions. The best of the amateur companies succeeded in making the necessary changes, by recruiting foremost directors. Delegates of their associations established contact with amateur companies abroad, and Flemish ones paid several visits to similar companies in neighbouring countries. Occasionally they went even further afield than the national companies, despite the fact that they were far more experienced. In the Dutch-language area of Belgium, amateur drama had flourished through the centuries and had fought honourably to preserve Flemish cultural heritage, even at the darkest moments of history. That which it succeeds in doing in the past, it will still be able to do tomorrow. Not a village in Flanders is without its enthusiasts, who will spend endless

time and take endless trouble to put on performances, often under the most rudimentary conditions. It may be that the repertoire or actual performances are not always of the highest calibre, but it has to be admitted that amateur dramatics fulfil an important role in the field of popular education. The continuity of Flemish awareness depends to a larger extent on the amateur theatre, with its tireless zeal, than on the professional theatre, no matter how great its recent progress.

THE NEW GENERATION OF PLAYWRIGHTS

Before attempting any analysis in depth of the work of the most important playwrights of the past ten years, we should mention two authors of particular interest, who wrote directly in the experimental, avant-garde spirit already referred to. They are Piet Sterckx and Jan Christiaens. The former made his debut with and owed his success to the «Nederlands Kamertoneel». Then he disappeared suddenly from theatrical life, at the very time when his talent had come to be generally recognized. The latter also began his career with the «Nederlands Kamertoneel», but seems to have sufficient resources still to go on writing for the stage. However, the manner he has adopted now differs somewhat from the one that brought him fame.

Piet STERCKX, born in 1925, was a little-known journalist from Antwerp when his first play «*De Verdwaalde Plant*» (The stray plant) was performed by the «Nederlands Kamertoneel», shortly after the company was formed. At first, some regarded him as a disciple of Ionesco or Beckett. «*De Verdwaalde Plant*» caused surprise by its subtly absurd dialogue and its confused, barely intelligible theme, vaguely reminiscent of Pirandello. The story of a man who disappears in winter, like some hibernating plant, is more than somewhat unusual.

Piet Sterckx never succeeded in explaining this work, nor for that matter could he explain the next one. He even claimed that the theatre did not interest him. Even so, he wrote play upon play, and the «Nederlands Kamertoneel» was always happy to perform them. Four of his works were produced and often, by their own admission, neither the actors nor the author understood what they were about. Piet Sterckx won the Triennial State Prize for the Theatre for the period 1954-1957, but the jury's decision was by no means unanimous.

Piet Sterckx wrote other works, including «*De Gelijkbenigen*» (Similar sides) which is stronger in every respect than its predecessors. It was at that moment that he disappeared suddenly from theatrical life and, at present, no theatrical company is showing any further interest in his work. Piet Sterckx was doubtless the product of a dramatic concept that was still too young and was seeking its maturity.

Jan CHRISTIAENS, born in 1929, was a slower starter than Sterckx but was doubtless more profound as well. He began by writing a one-act play for the «Experimentele Werkgroep voor Toneel» (The Experimental Theatre) long

before this company had found a permanent home. Then, thanks to a decisive recommendation from the «Vereniging van Vlaamse Toneelauteurs» (Association of Flemish Playwrights) the first of his full-length works «*Tedrinken*» (While drinking tea), which date from 1958, was included in the programme of the «Arca-Kelderteater» in Ghent. In «*Tedrinken*» the writer warns against the dangers of state control pushed to extreme lengths, emphasizes human imperfection and that every conceivable form of political organization.

This first success seems to have spoilt Jan Christiaens and may explain the looseness of his subsequent work «*Een Vredesduif brade*» (Cooking the dove of peace) which he wrote in 1959 and which shows traces of haste and carelessness. This sketch of a minor employee who is the victim of his chiefs, is too abstract. Jan Christiaens has also written another play which has not yet been performed. Meanwhile, another one-acter entitled «*De Beestentrein*» (The cattle train), which is often performed in Flanders, testifies to his very real gifts as a dramatic writer.

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«Tone Brulin, who was born in Antwerp in 1921, is one of the most eclectic Flemish writer of the present time. He was one of the first, if not the first, to embark on bold new theatrical ventures. His experiments, which are concerned mainly with form, may appear gratuitous at first sight, but when confronted with theatrical realities they never fail to astound the most sceptical audiences with their great dramatic effectiveness. Tone Brulin moved on and also wrote purely traditional works which brought him success, even though they were never devoid of experiment and fantasy. This writer, who has travelled far and wide, has had his plays performed in many European countries. Tone Brulin attended almost any school of dramatic art in which he thought it would be possible to further his theatrical training. In Brussels he attended the Conservatoire and was a member for some time of the «Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg», in Antwerp he performed at the «Jeugdteater» and he was one of the first students accepted for the «Studio» of the «Nationale Toneel» (see above). As an actor he took part in several tours in Germany. Afterwards he spent some time in Scandinavia and in Czechoslovakia. He visited the US on a study tour, and worked for three years as an assistant in the Drama Department of the University of Denver. By means of a scholarship, he stayed two months in

Britain, where he spent most of his time at Stratford-on-Avon which, as everyone knows, is Shakespeare country. He spent some time in South Africa, where he staged several plays. He returned to Europe via Ghana, where he married the daughter of a tribal chief.

Brulin has also visited many other countries, sometimes only to attend the first night of one of his plays.

Although Brulin has mainly had an actor's training, he is not particularly gifted in this field. He moved backstage, and then began writing for the theatre. He has also directed programmes for the Dutch-language television service in Belgium.

Most of his works were so bold and experimental that it was virtually impossible to stage them. They were published either in periodicals or in book form. Recognition came in 1953, at the time of the opening of the «Nederlands Kamertoneel», of which he was one of the founder members. For its first performance, this company staged five of Brulin's one act plays, with the author himself as director and as a member of the cast.

These five playlets illustrated the manifold facets of his talent, for they ranged from the tragic to the comic and even to the absurd, and also included a venture into the subconscious.

His debut in the official theatre took place in 1955 and 1956, but even before then his one act plays had been included in special programmes. «Nu het dorp niet meer bestaat» (Now that the village no longer exists) is his first full-length play. The subject is based on an inspiration that came to him when visiting Czechoslovakia.



«Potop» by Tone Brulin.

The play, which was written in 1949, appeared in a volume containing traditional works together with others representing the «theatre of absurd». «Nu het dorp niet meer bestaat» deals with the tragic fate of the small village of Oradour-sur-Glane, in Czechoslovakia which, like the French village of Oradour-sur-Glane, was razed to the ground, in retaliation for the assassination of the German Governor-General Heydrich. After the liberation, the German major who ordered the massacre takes refuge in a neighbouring castle, while the Communist resistance fighter who shot the Governor-General returns to the site of the ruined village. The dramatic tension created by the confrontation between these two antagonists is not depicted logically but is nevertheless highly charged with emotion.

«Nu het dorp niet meer bestaat» is not a play committed to either the right or the left but is concerned solely with the problem of justice.

The play succeeded another, and Tone Brulin began to apply the practice that was already widespread abroad, of making each performance a decisive test for the play. In some cases he urged the author to rewrite or alter the play. Tone Brulin's works have not all been staged yet, either in Belgium or abroad : this is always the playwright's fault, and is due mainly to the indifference of theatre management.

Tone Brulin who, as already mentioned, has the habit of rewriting plays even after they have already been staged, wrote a play for television called «Pas op, Mijnheer Lipman (Careful, Mr. Lipman is coming). He made several versions of it, as well as an

adaptation for television. Later «Pas op, Mijnheer Lipman komt» became a stage play which the «Nationale Toneel» performed with the author himself as director.

The plot of this play, in which there are only three characters, is too complex to be related here. It is a psychological drama invoking several themes : the individual's fight against repression, anxiety (the whole work is set in an anguished atmosphere), love, and the fascination of chance meetings, marital fidelity and the haphazard nature of relationships that may threaten a couple's happiness. The author describes it as a tragedy of cowardice. It differs from traditional Flemish works in both form and content, and it displays none of the usual characteristics.

«Pas op, Mijnheer Lipman komt» was a valuable contribution to Belgian dramatic literature in Dutch, and it was awarded the Triennial State Prize for the Theatre.

«Pas op, Mijnheer Lipman komt» foreshadowed Tone Brulin's subsequent concern with the problems of racial discrimination. He had lived in the Congo and in South Africa, and later wrote several plays drawn from his experiences there : «Potopot» and «Schildknaap van een Vechtjas» (Attendant to violence), a less accomplished work. Both were first performed by the «Nederlands Kamertoneel» and deal with the relations between whites and negroes. Before writing «De Honden» (The dogs), his most impassioned work about race relationships, based on an event that actually happened in South Africa, he found time to concoct a thriller-in-reverse «Nonkel en de Juke-box» (Uncle and the juke-box). Although «De Honden» was an earlier work than «Poto-

pot» and *«Schildknaap van een Vechtjas»*, it was not staged until 1961, by the «Nationale Toneel».

Tone Brulin, who does not revere art for art's sake, believes that the playwright's craft is closer to that of the reporter than of the researcher or inventor.

Both its characters and its theme make *«De Honden»* into a strikingly realistic piece of reporting. A police inspector and his assistant are instructed by the South African authorities to investigate the mysterious disappearance of several coloured men who had been sentenced to forced labour in an agricultural settlement. The investigation leads to a number of highly disturbing revelations, with racial factors in the foreground. Although Brulin has couched his play mainly in the form of a thriller, he also provides a penetrating analysis of the relationship between a father and his children — two sons and a daughter. Equally penetrating is his rendering of the anachronistic concept of paternal authority and the education of young people, making an old peasant character into a real potentate.

«De Honden» aroused political repercussions — at the diplomatic level to be more precise. These however did not prevent the play being performed again repeatedly abroad, for the message which it contains is valid in other countries too. Brulin afterwards dropped the racial theme and reverted to experimental works. Expressionism too tempted him anew, and he wrote an appealing satire *«In Aanwezigheid van de Minister...»* (In the presence of the Minister...). So far however, none of his later plays have attained the level of the three analysed above. His latest offering *«Haasje-*

over in West-Berlijn» (Leap-frog in West Berlin) was staged by the author himself at the «Nationale Toneel», but it aroused little interest because it was too obscure and hastily composed.

Tone Brulin has not yet revealed the full measure of his talent.

» (Leap-frog in West Berlin) author himself at the « but it aroused little interest

CLAUS

—L.D. and Hasty Cott.

and, and also in the French and Dutch areas of Belgium, Hugo Claus who in 1929 is regarded as an outstanding writer who has displayed equal talent in poetry and novels, and in his writings for theatre and the cinema. His success can be explained partly by his unusual personality and more precisely, by his particularly interest in the confined world that gravitates around the Scheldt and the Meuse, but it is due also to his remarkable verbal genius.

In his novels and poetry, the fame of Claus was already well established in the speaking areas when he first tackled theatre. The drama has since then acquired much appeal for him, that he has of course more writing for the theatre than for other medium.

He won the Triennial State Prize for the first play «*Een Bruid in de Morgenride in the morning*», which he wrote at age of twenty-four and which, having been performed in Holland, was staged later by the «Nationale Toneel». The next plays by Claus were all staged in Holland and then in Belgium. He had established close friendship with Ton Lutz, a Dutch director, and this probably explains his decided to have his plays shown in first Ton Lutz thus became the first director of Claus's plays.

As far as the novels of Hugo Claus, it has been said that they are akin to the work of the American novelists of to-day, and his

ens his plays, particularly those depicting uncouth bumpkins and brigands, whose speech he renders far too literary.

«*Een Bruid in de Morgen*», his first work, which many regard as his masterpiece, is similar in subject to his first novel «*De Metsiers*» (Duck hunting), which deals with an abnormal relationship between a sister and her retarded brother, living in a depraved family. In «*Een Bruid in de Morgen*» there is apparent incest too but what is actually involved is a very pure poetic tie between a sister and her hypersensitive, somewhat naive brother. The mother has immoral schemes, and wants to marry her son off to one of her nieces who is older than he is. Andrea, the sister, resists this plan with all her might, and when she realizes that she cannot prevent the marriage and that she will lose her brother, she kills herself. To some extent Hugo Claus disconcerted Flemish audiences, who were at that time somewhat chary of topics out of tune with the prevailing moral tenets.

One year after «*Een Bruid in de Morgen*», «*Het Lied van de Moordenaar*» (The murderer's song), another new play by Claus had its first showing in Holland. It deals with a gang of robbers that had been legendary in the 1880's. Their leader, who is idolized by his men, falls in love with a baroness and this leads to his downfall. The play did not arouse any enthusiasm, either at its first showing in Holland nor subsequently in Antwerp and Brussels.

«*Suiker*» (Sugar), the third play which Claus wrote, restored and enhanced his reputation. «*Suiker*» is a naturalist play set in the barracks erected for Flemish border workers who pick the sugar-beet harvest in the North of France.

The author had come to know this kind of life during the years he spent roaming about Europe. A prostitute who sells her charms to the seasonal workers hopes to find salvation in her love for a simple Flemish «coolie», known as Kilo. He loves her too, but knows nothing of her past. One of the other men in the barracks, who realizes he is losing the girl, tells Kilo the truth and encourages him to murder her, but in the end Kilo decides to work for the young woman's salvation. The coarseness of the atmosphere and roughness of the characters in this play are redeemed by its many amusing touches and its bitter-sweet humour. Like «*Een Bruid in de Morgen*», «*Suiker*» has been shown in many foreign theatres, has been performed in Paris and even in the U.S.A., but there it proved less successful than expected.

Next came «*Kijk, Mama, zonder handen*» (Look Mummy, no hands) an «absurd» comedy which did not have its first showing in Holland until later. «*De Dans van de Reiger*» (The heron's dance), which followed, was a fairly amusing philosophical tale about romantic love lost in the human jungle of eroticism. Claus seemed unable to attain the same high standards as he had in his first plays. «*Tijl*», an adaption of Charles De Coster's *Uylenspiegel* legend, was staged as a lavish production, while the adaption of «*Het Goudland*» (The gold country), an adventure story by Hendrik Conscience, was a total flop. The author then raised Seneca,

from oblivion and recreated the dreadful tragedy of «*Thyestes*», which had a mixed reception and the merit of which resides in its little quality. It was performed at the Holland Festival by the «Toneel Vandaag» company, was shown also at the International Theatre Festival in Paris.

The work of Hugo Claus, as a writer for stage and screen, is a matter of interest throughout the whole of Belgium. The sensation of the 1969-1970 season his play «*Vrijdag*» (Friday), in which he explores the nature of the common man in Flanders and attains a directness of style that marks perhaps his finest work.



The word freedom
by Herwig Hensen.

HERWIG HENSEN

Herwig Hensen, born in 1917, is a unique case in Flemish drama and literature. His case is unique not only because of his scientific background (he was a teacher of mathematics) combined with the fact that he is a good poet, but also because he has written some of the best constructed, though highly cerebral plays of the Flemish theatre. Even so he is not sufficiently appreciated, if of course appreciation is to be gauged by the number of times his already considerable volume of works has been performed. For a long time Herwig Hensen locked himself up in an ivory tower, refused all publicity and never submitted any plays to theatrical managements. It is his contention that it is the manager's role to look out interesting works, and that all he need do is make sure his plays are published. Herwig Hensen began by writing poetry. His first volume appeared in 1936, it was soon followed by others, and in 1940 he won the Triennial State Prize for Poetry. «Antonio», his first play, had its maiden performance at the official theatre in Ghent. «Antonio» was the prelude to a series of works including «Lady Godiva», «Don Juan», «Koningin Christina» (Queen Christina), «Polukrates» (Polycrates), «Alkestis» (Alcestis), «Agamemnon» (Agamemnon), «Hannibal» and «De andere Jehanne» (The other Jehanne). This list is by no means exhaustive, and some of his plays have never been staged as yet. Ghent was the first to discover him, so far his work has only been shown once in Brussels, and finally it was with Ant-

werp audiences that Hensen found the real favour. The value of his work is such, however, as to merit far greater acclaim. The «Nationale Toneel» of Antwerp has performed some of his plays, and his «Agamemnon» has been staged several times by the drama students at the «Studio».

As their titles show, all these works are of a very classical form and deal with historical events which the author uses to illustrate his philosophy. At the beginning, carnal love is the principal theme. In later plays this is replaced by the concept of death as a release which strong characters accept as an offering, symbolizing their revolt against tradition and the conventions.

Herwig Hensen has a profound admiration for Shakespeare, and it is possible to detect in his works an echo of the famous English playwright's style and construction. Hensen's philosophy however is derived from Nietzsche. In 1948, he won the Triennial State Prize for Theatre. Three years ago, he resigned his post as a teacher of mathematics in order to lecture on dramatic art at the «Rijkshoger Instituut voor Toneel en Cultuurspreiding» (Higher National Institute for Theatrical Art and Culture). The writer, who uses historical themes to project contemporary problems and modern philosophical concepts, has also written plays with a topical social message. In «Het Woord van de Vrijheid» (The word freedom) he shows how man can be caught up in the wheels of revolution and that from that time onwards nothing is free: individual liberty is dead. In one of his rare realist plays, «Morgen kan het te laat zijn» (Tomorrow may be too late) he conveys the same message, although it is pre-

Hensen found the most detective story. It is a warning against work is such, however, as of individual freedom, against the dangers of acclaim. The «National» — an being ensnared in the chaos of a is performed some of what has fallen prey to increasingly con- «soon» has been staged —oon» has been stag- ideologies.

drama students at

These works are of great significance. He cannot be cri- deal with history. For the fact that his work is so little per- uses to illustrate — in the vernacular, but although it is gning, carnal love w- later plays this w- need, it stands out for its far more pro- of death as a release —ities, its artistry of the apt expres- accept as an offer —ing Hensen's work is mainly cerebral against tradition and therefore requires some effort on the part

profound admiration

is possible to detect the famous English pl-

construction. Hensen's p- ed from Nietzsche. —ral State Prize for —co, he resigned his pa- tatics in order to lectu

WAN HOECK

«Kshoger Instituut vo

«Gids» (Higher Nation-

al Culture).

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has also written plays — Triennial State Prize for the Thea- message. In «Het Wo- — his works has been successfully freedom) he shows how — abroad. His debut took place in

in the wheels of rev- — «Nationale Toneel» with a «conjunc- time onwards no m- — one of the plot was left to chance, and Morgen kan het te la- —ected somewhat from the dramatic de too late) he co- — Sauternes 1921» nevertheless won a although it is prese

Three years later, in 1957, his «Voorlopig Von- nis» (Provisional sentence) created a sensation. The play was cleverly contrived, but benefitted also from its outstanding production by the lamented Fred Engelen, at the «Nationale Toneel». «Voorlopig Vonnis» was based on the saga of the atomic spy Klaus Fuchs, a topic that had already been treated for the stage by Carl Zuckmayer. Jozef Van Hoeck gave it more original treatment, for his play consists of only three characters, one of whom depicts several different types of individuals, expresses opinions and, to some extent, serves as a chorus. It also uses screen techniques such as the flash-back and the leap into the future, which give the work its own particular flavour. Although the first part of «Voorlopig Vonnis» smacks at times of the serial story, the latter part is intensely dramatic. The play proved extremely successful, and has been translated and shown in many foreign languages. The writer's next play, «Appartement te Huur» (Apartment to let), was another conjugal drama patterned on Ibsen, with an audacious topic and many flash-backs.

It did not enjoy the same success as «Voorlopig Vonnis»; it was not as original as the preceding play, although it was perhaps better constructed and more powerful. «Appartement te Huur» won the Triennial State Prize for the Theatre which, in truth, should have gone to Van Hoeck for his previous work. His last play «De Raad van Beheer» (The board of directors) has not fulfilled the hopes which the writer's earlier works had aroused.

LUC VILSEN

Luc Vilzen, born in 1921, had already published some novels, as well as a play that was performed by the «Reizend Volkstheater», when recognition came to him through the recommendation to the «Nationaal Toneel» of his «Passion play» «*Het Eeuwige Sanhedrin*» (The eternal Sanhedrin) by the «Vereniging van Vlaamse Toneelauteurs» (Association of Flemish Playwrights). «*Het Eeuwige Sanhedrin*» was particularly well staged by the «Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg» in Antwerp. Luc Vilzen is attracted by dramatic themes resulting from the relationship between religion and politics. His first work contained a number of errors of construction, and its successor «*De genaamde Greco*» (The man named Greco) was first written for broadcasting and then adapted for television. In the theatre, the play made a good impression when it was first performed in a good production by the «Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg» in Brussels. It relates the famous Greek painter's experiences under the dreaded Spanish Inquisition. The play has also been performed in Paris.

In «*Storm over Firenze*» (Storm over Florence) a work based on the strange and fascinating character Savonarole, Luc Vilzen again tackles the same subject but, despite the hard work he put into this play, it did not attain the same effect. The play, which is imbued with great dramatic intensity, starts well but flags towards the end.

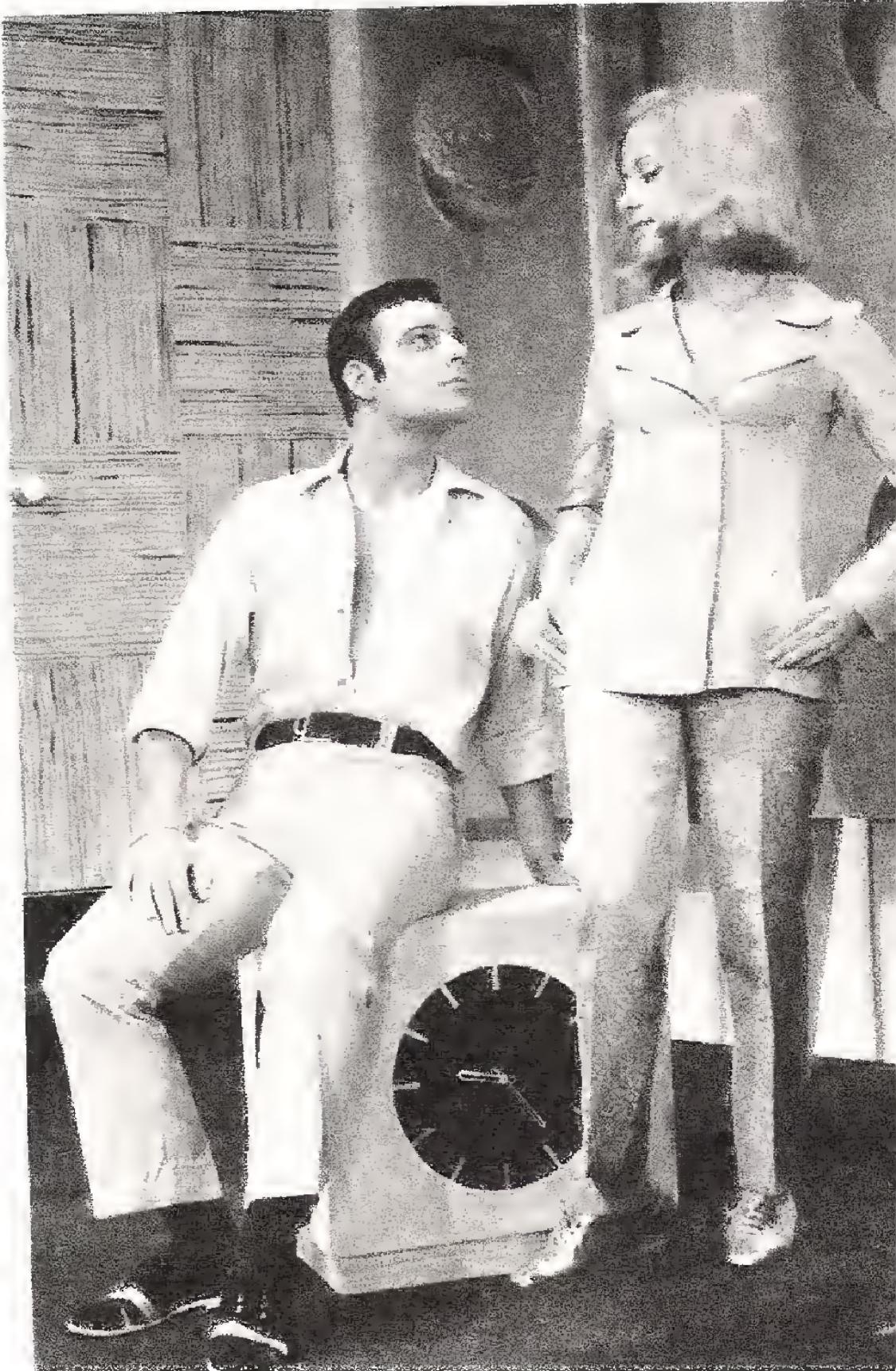
The final scene of «*Storm over Firenze*» is not in the best of taste and was hotly debated at the time of its first showing in Brussels. The writer has since then rewritten it in parts. So-

me critics do not recognize Luc Vilzen as writer of the first rank, but others maintain «*Storm over Firenze*» contains passages which show a sure and thorough knowledge of drama.

STAF KNOP

Staf Knop, born in 1921, specializes in a comedy. Working first as a journalist in the capital city, he performed in amateur companies and was one of the founders of the «Brussels Kamertoneel» (Brussels Chamber Theatre) became and still is the favourite author of Brussels «Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg». He began by writing an unpretentious comedy «*De Knecht*» (The valet), which has often been performed in Flanders. Staf Knop, who followed in the footsteps of Paul Géraldy and performed even more of André Roussin, then produced number of marital comedies : «*De Vrouw en het Huwelijk*» (The fruits of marriage) «*Mijn Geweten en Ik*» (My conscience and I). This latter play is widely thought to be his best. It has been performed in Paris and adapted for showing on television as a musical. It contains four characters : a couple of people who are torn by futile quarrels, and the reification of their consciences. The reprobates imbroglios lent themselves perfectly to treatment as a musical.

The author's latest works «*Nana*» and «*Der Postuum*» (The late Alexander) have somewhat disappointing but nevertheless Staf Knop remains a writer of light comedy whom much can still be expected.



«The late Alexander»
by Staf Knop.

PIETER DE PRINS

Some writers from the Dutch-language area of Belgium have had their works performed both at home and abroad, even though they have not yet been shown in any of the three official Flemish theatres. This is no fault of theirs.

Among this small group, Pieter De Prins, born in 1926, is a particularly striking case in point. While working as a young journalist, De Prins began writing poetry and won several official awards. He began writing for the theatre towards the year 1954, resorting for some time to the collaboration of an accomplished actor, Oscar Ferket, who was well versed in theatrical techniques. Some seven or eight plays emerged in this way, and several of them won acclaim in Holland.

Next Pieter De Prins wrote one-act plays which apparently were better liked abroad than in Belgium. In particular we should quote «*De Stoel*» (The chair) and «*De Gieren*» (Vultures), which have won various awards and a French translation of which has appeared in «*L'Avant-Scène*», a theatrical review published in Paris. «*De Stoel*» has been performed in France, while «*De Gieren*» has been performed in French in a Brussels pocket theatre and, in its original Dutch-language version, was later included in the repertoire of the Antwerp «Fakkelteater». «*De Gieren*» had also been shown on Flemish television and in Chile, in Italy and, repeatedly, in Holland. Other works by Pieter De Prins have also been translated into several languages and have aroused interest in foreign countries.

«*Andreas Vesalius*», his most recent play based on the life of this famous Flemish doctor of the Renaissance period, who fathered the science of anatomy. «*Andreas Vesalius*» had a successful first performance by the «Visie Centrum voor Nederlandstalige Dramaturgie» (Flemish Drama Centre), which was founded by the Association of Flemish Playwrights to promote the performance of original works written in the Dutch language.

FRANS COOLS

Frans Cools, born in 1923, is an interesting writer who produced some ten plays in a short time. He prefers to write thrillers and for this reason perhaps, has become one of the Flemish writers whose works have been most frequently performed recently. However, his latest work «*Diagnose genezen*» (Diagnose and cure), which earned him an official prize, is a thriller but a marital drama. It has been performed by the «Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg» in Brussels. Frans Cools is a writer with a future.

THE OTHER NAMES

playwrights, who have had one or more performed by the «National Toneel» or other companies, have not written anything for theatre since, or have for professional reasons turned in other directions. This has been the case with Johan DAISNE, Marcel DE LIÈGE, Liane BRUYLANTS, Andries POPPE, André VAN ROEY, Jan VAN DEN BRANDE, René DEUREN, Valeer VAN KERCKHOVEN and Willy de SCHUTTER (who has also devised ingenious games for the Antwerp «Jeugdtheater». They can be mentioned here in their capacity of playwrights thanks to the efforts of Jean Mortier who, for seventeen years, managed the «National Toneel» and gave many writers their opportunity.

Walter EYSSELINCK, Paul BERKENMAN and André VAN VREKHEM are all writers of plays but not yet sufficiently experienced. The play of all three has drawn attention thanks to the performance of their plays by the small companies. «De dood van twee Dames» (The death of two ladies) by Georges Van Vrekhem was first shown by the Gent «Nederlands Toneel Gent» during its 1967-68 season, since the author has since then become this company's theatrical adviser. «Cassandra» by Walter Eysselinck, was first shown by this same company during its 1968-69 season, but neither play proved convincing.

THE FUTURE

In Belgium the style and the structure of dramatic works written in the Dutch language, influenced as they are by the cinema, by television and by other modern techniques, have evolved to such an extent that they are arousing ever greater interest in the theatre. Regrettably however, dramatic art still appeals almost solely to the intellectuals and the group that might be called semi-intellectual. The popular mass is not yet sufficiently attracted by the theatre.

Since 1945 the Dutch-language theatre in Belgium has relinquished its traditions and constant factors, both as regards acting methods and the actual literature. The Flemish theatre has made its contribution to the international theatrical evolution.

The indications are that, if the State accepts its responsibility, the Flemish theatre, the theatre in that part of the country which used to be called Flanders, will be able to fill an enviable place in the world's dramatic literature.

In 1889 it was said of Hendrik Ibsen that «this man is dominating the world thanks to Norwegian, the language of a small country». It is our hope and wish that one day the same may be said of the Dutch language. That is what the future will show.

Paul VAN MORCKHOVEN.



PAUL VAN MORCKHOVEN, who was born in 1910, first embarked on a career in teaching and then switched to journalism. In 1930 he founded an itinerant theatrical company that performed avant-garde plays. He is now the chairman of the «Vereniging van Vlaamse Toneelauteurs» (Association of Flemish Playwrights), and he is the theatre critic for the newspaper «De Standaard» and for various Belgian and Dutch periodicals.

His best known works include the following : «*Amor spant zijn boog*» (Love tenses its bow) a comedy.

«*Draaimolen*» (Carrousel), a one-act play.

«*Karel van Denemarken*» (Charles of Denmark), an historic drama.

«*Het Buitenkansje*» (The windfall), a comedy.

«*Bartholomeusnacht*» (St. Bartholomew's night), a one-act play.

In addition, Paul Van Morckhoven is an excellent translator. He has translated works by Berthold Brecht, including «*Mutter Courage*» (Mother Courage), by Wittinger, «*Zwei Links, Zwei Rechts*» (Two left, two right) and by Bloch, «*De Handen van Eurydice*» (The hands of Eurydice).

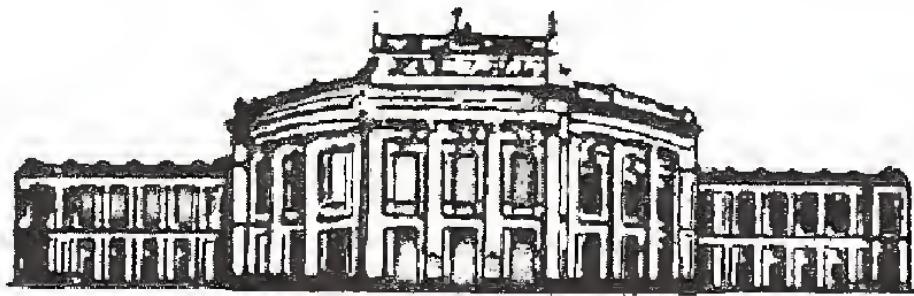
«*Het Amerikaans Toneel*» (The American theatre) and «*De Essentie van de Dramatiek*» (The foundations of the drama) are his most significant essays.

die Ärche

wiener studentenbühne
wien 1., ebendorferstraße 8, tel. 42 93 00
12.-15., 20.-29. april 1967, 20 uhr

österreichische
erstaufführung

jozef van hoek
einstweilige
verfügung



BURGTHEATER IM AKADEMIETHEATER

Donnerstag, den 5. Dezember 1963

Bei aufgehobenem Abonnement - Preise III

Zum ersten Male:

SCHNEE

Ein Stück von Paul Willems

in vier Akten

Deutsch von Maria Sommer

Regie: Rudolf Steinboeck

Anfang 20 Uhr

Bühnenbilder: Lois Egg

Kostüme: Erni Kniepert

Ende nach 22.45 Uhr

Musik: Paul Angerer

The French-language theatre

■■■ F INTRODUCTION...

■■■ the contention that Brussels is merely
■■■ a sort of Paris, plays do appear from time
■■■ to time which are devised and written by a Bel-

■■■ was the opening paragraph of a survey of
■■■ Belgian theatre by Romain Sanvic, which
■■■ appeared in the Paris «Revue Théâtrale» in
■■■ 1947. Though brief, it is a highly revealing
■■■ quote, for it reflects both a sense of fierce
■■■ pride and an inferiority complex. Brussels, an
■■■ a sort of Paris ? Brussels, a provincial city
■■■ annexed to the capital city of France ? Sanvic
■■■ admits this yet denies it too. It is this con-
■■■ cept which expresses in a nutshell the
■■■ dilemma of Belgium's French-language theatre.

providing the Paris stage with highly gifted
artists, who used to come back to Belgium
on tour once they made their name ; but this
system meant also that they were lost for
Belgium. Some of the names which come to
mind in this way are those of Berthe Bovy,
Fernand Ledoux, Victor Francen, Madeleine
Ozeray, Raymond Rouleau, Lucienne Lemar-
chand, Jean Servais, etc...

The same applied to playwrights. The Belgian
Wiener became the typically Parisian Francis
de Croisset who had such a successful career
in comedy. Others such as Maurice Maeter-
linck, or Fernand Crommelynck, only became
successful when they had been acclaimed in
Paris.

Attempts had been made between the wars to
create a Belgian school. These attempts were
undertaken by brave individualists and, at the
time, they appeared to have ended in failure.
Yet it was this which lay at the root of the pre-
sent development of the Belgian theatre.
Foremost among these pioneers was Jules
Delacre.

S ■■■ ERUSSELS PROVINCIAL COMPARED ■■■ TO PARIS ?

Oddly enough, the emergence of the Belgian
theatre in French only dates back to 1940.
Until then, Belgium had from a drama point
of view been regarded as one of the French
provinces. Most of the leading parts in plays
performed in Brussels and Liege were filled
by actors from France. To make a name for
themselves, Belgian actors had to go and work
in Paris. Belgium could pride herself on

THE «THEATRE DU MARAIS»

He was a young poet, born in Vilvorde in 1883, whose volumes — «*L'Offertoire*» (The offering), «*Roses blanches*» (White roses) and «*Le chant provincial*» (Song of the provinces) — have lost none of their original subtlety. In his native city, Jules Delacre took charge of the local dramatic society, taking part both in the acting and production. He spent the war years in London. As he was turned down by the army for health reasons, he set up a small theatrical company that had the honour of performing «*L'anglais tel qu'on le parle*» (English as it is spoken), by Tristan Bernard, before King George V.

Upon his return to Belgium he had but one thought : to form a theatrical company at home as he had done in exile. On 22 February 1922, the brand new «*Theatre du Marais*» was opened to the public. The programme contained a manifesto, the following extract of which has lost none of its topicality :

«Works — that will be our motto. We do not blush over such an elementary act of faith, since our very conscience is involved and since the unhappy state of the Theatre today compels us to start at the beginning».

In spite of its triumphal tours abroad, the «*Théâtre du Marais*» had to close after five years (in 1926).

In 1930 it was reopened by two of Delacre's pupils, Aimé Declercq and Raymond Rouleau. This time it was the theatre's success which deprived Belgium of a promising company. In

1932 Rouleau staged «*Le Mal de la jeunesse*» (The pangs of youth), by the German playwright Brückner and took the play to Paris where it was vastly successful. Rouleau's company — including Jean Servais, Thérèse Balachova, Lucienne Bogaert, Madeleine Ozeray and Lucienne Lemarchand — stayed on in Paris.

Once again, it was the appeal of Paris that proved the Belgian theatre's loss. As to Jules Delacre, he went on working in Brussels. Outstanding teacher, he went on training many promising young actors. Until his death in 1954, he was a valued adviser to the budding National Theatre.

THE «RATAILLON» THE «VAUDEVILLE»

It would be unfair to claim that, during the historic days between the wars, Jules Destrée was completely alone in his efforts on behalf of the theatre.

There were other companies — most of them amateur — with similar aims, including Albert Lepage's «Rataillon».

The «Rataillon», the first pocket theatre in Belgium, was formed in 1930. Its first headquarters were in the back-room of a cafe in the popular Molenbeek district, but it moved several times. Its creator, director and principal actor was, in addition, a poet and playwright. Hence the new company made its debut with a play by Albert Lepage — *Antigone* — followed at greater or lesser intervals by other plays from the same author. But the «Rataillon» also staged plays by other Belgian writers : Max Deauville, Roger Avermaete, Ghelderode, Maurice Turnerelle, Charles Plisnier, Edmond Kinds, etc... One of this enterprising company's greatest successes was its production of «King Ubu» in 1938.

The Rataillon still went on performing for a few years after the war, and more will be said about Albert Lepage in his capacity as a playwright.

A number of other attempts were made to renew the theatre, even by managements which had always concentrated on plays from Paris : e.g. the «Théâtre du Parc», which presented several plays by Ghelderode.

Nor should we omit to mention the efforts of a theatre that specialized in the lightest type of comedy, the Vaudeville Theatre, where outstandingly good actors such as Darman, Gustave Libeau and Marcel Roels used to perform. The Revue which it presented year by year was a typically Belgian but highly amusing and often quite subtle production.

This too was the time when Fernand Piette began his «Théâtre de l'Equipe» which is still touring the country with first-rate shows intended for working class audiences.

Thus between the wars there flew the swallows which heralded the spring of the Belgian theatre. Unexpected circumstances then helped this spring to blossom forth.



Performances of «Barabbas» by Michel de Ghelderode, at the Rataillon The-

E BELGIAN THEATRE DURING THE OCCUPATION

In May 1940, the nazi troops invaded Belgium and the country was to remain occupied for four years and a half.

Attempting to destroy all French influence in the Belgian territories, the German authorities prohibited the entry of French actors, and the Belgian theatre was thrown back on its own resources. At the same time it achieved new heights of popularity. Entertainment was scarcer than travel was difficult, and people did not feel like going to cinemas which were showing mostly German films. There remained the theatre, and audiences flocked to it. Faced with this golden opportunity, actors, directors and producers rose to the challenge.

New companies were formed and moved into traditional theatres : the «Parc», «Galeries» and «Molière» theatres. In September 1940 the «Parc» reopened with Shakespeare's «Hamlet» (Shakespeare was the only English playwright whose works were authorized) : the hall was too overflowing but when the gravedigger to overflowing but when the gravedigger remarked that men in England are mad there were loud protests from the audience and in subsequent performances this line had to be cut. Every type of play was performed, but especially the classics — Shakespeare, Corneille, Marivaux, Racine, Beaumarchais, Molière. They brought success to an actor, Marcel Poels, who had until then been confined to

Belgian writers too benefited from the theatre's new-found popularity. One by one, the Galeries Theatre showed most of Cormenynck's plays, while the Parc performed those of Ghelderode. New talent began to emerge. Raymond Gérôme embarked on his career as actor, director and playwright. The public flocked to applaud a young actress, Marthe Dugard, who performed under the direction of Adrien Meyer. The company of Marcel Josz staged an outstanding production of «*Tripes d'Or*» (Golden entrails). A new company was formed at this time which was destined to grow and flourish. In 1943, in the Chamber Music hall of the «Palais des Beaux Arts», the «Rideau de Bruxelles» gave its first performance and enjoyed a tremendous success. The play was «*The Matron of Ephesus*», the first work of a promising young writer, Georges Sion. Somewhat later, the «Rideau» gave another talented novice his opportunity, it performed «*Tristan*» by José-André Lacour. Then there was a young amateur company that had grown from the Boy Scout movement, known as the «Comédiens Routiers Belges» (Belgian Travelling Company). Constantly on the move, performing in small Walloon villages as well as in the cities, their greatest success was «*Le Jeu des Quatre Fils Aymon*» (The tale of the four Aymon brothers) which Herman Closson had written specially for them and which was first shown at Faulx-les-Tombes in August 1941. Based on the legend which relates the struggle of four brothers from the Ardennes against the powerful Emperor Charlemagne, this impassioned tale of heroic deeds proved highly topical and the performances soon turned into public resistance demonstrations.

The German authorities banned the play, but it continued to be performed under another title, «*Le Cheval Bayard*» (Steed Bayard), ostensibly by an unknown writer.

In 1944 the «*Comédiens Routiers*» also gave the first performance of a play that had been written by one of the members : it was «*Compagnons*» (Companions) by Maurice Huisman.

A NEW POLICY FOR THE THEATRE

First the liberation, then peace.

The position of the Belgian theatre was extremely promising, yet fraught with danger too. On the one hand it had gained a following. But on the other hand, the return to normal — renewed opportunities for travel, a plethora of foreign, particularly American films, and return of French actors — might have caused it to lose this following.

In addition, there was too much centralization. Except for Brussels, Liege was the only French-language city with a permanent company, the «*Théâtre du Gymnase*». Other theatres were used for opera or musical comedy, straight plays were performed only by the remaining French companies which were beginning to reappear in Belgium. Herein too lay a danger.

Having proved its vitality, the Belgian theatre needed help so as not to lose the ground it had conquered, to get through a difficult period and to make further progress. This help was provided by the State, which introduced a system of theatrical subsidies.

The first step was to create a National Theatre, or rather two : one in Dutch, in Antwerp, one in French, with headquarters in Brussels. We shall only mention the latter.

The subsidies allocated for this National Theatre were in accordance with the heavy expenses which it entailed. But financial help was also given to the other theatres, providing their productions were of a clearly cultural level.

THE NATIONAL THEATRE

begin with the National Theatre.

When this was first established, the management was entrusted to two brothers, Jacques and Maurice Huisman, who had formerly run the «Comédiens Routiers Belges». (1) This decision aroused heated debate, because such an important task had been entrusted to amateurs without basic professional training.

The National Theatre soon attained professional standards, for it recruited members from all parts of the theatre world, and the polemics died down.

From its origins however, the National Theatre showed a desire to change the tone of Belgian theatrical life. Its promoters' aims were to widen the spectrum of its audiences, to attract those who were not in the habit of visiting the theatre. It decided to search these audiences out.

From the start, therefore, the National Theatre functioned as a travelling company. During most of its existence (twenty-four years so far) it has consisted of three troupes which alternate as follows: while one performs in Brussels, the second is touring the main provincial cities, while the third is playing in small towns and villages. More than a hundred different places in Belgium have thus been visited, either on a regular or an occasional basis.

For the benefit of the lower income groups, season tickets were extremely low priced. They were offered for sale either through local

representatives or through the welfare departments of large firms and government offices. It may fairly be claimed that the work of the National Theatre has borne fruit. New audiences have been built up and, their taste for the theatre having been whetted, they have also begun to attend performances by other companies. As a result, season tickets at reduced prices were introduced by other theatres too. Soon the Belgian provinces began to enjoy ample theatrical coverage for, like the National Theatre, other theatres from Brussels and Liege were soon in the habit of presenting their productions away from home.

One drawback resulting from this campaign to recruit untutored audiences was reflected, during the National Theatre's first years, in its choice of plays. Being untutored, this new range of spectators would not have accepted novelties or experiments. Works by avant-garde writers from abroad or by young Belgian playwrights might have deterred them. Hence the fairly unadventurous nature of the repertoire (if Shakespeare, Shaw, Giraudoux or Claudel may be regarded as «unadventurous»). In this particular field, other companies were destined to play an important role.

(1) After a few years, Jacques Huisman remained as the sole director of the National Theatre. Maurice Huisman has now become the director of the National Opera.



A scene from «Hamlet»,
as performed by the
Belgian National Theatre.

• «RIDEAU DE BRUXELLES» • OTHER COMPANIES...

«Rideau de Bruxelles» was the first company to undertake this pioneering work. As already mentioned, its first performance had consisted of a young writer's first play : «The Return of Ephesus» by Georges Sion. It has been on fulfilling this early promise. The best Belgian playwrights to have emerged in post-war Belgium, have had their work performed first by this company. Moreover, its director, Claude Léveillé, has spared no effort to encourage rising talent. After reading a novel by Paul Willems, «Tout est réel ici» (All is real), he decided to commission a play from the author, who had never before written for the stage. The result was «Le bon Vin de M. Nuche» (The good wine of Mr. Nuche). Even more unusual, he later commissioned Willems and the composer Ralph Darbo to write :

A play suitable for a comedy company, in which the music and the songs are not only a text for the show, but an important extension of the dialogue, and that they should be linked to the action. In addition, the show should be pleasing to the eye, and the music in such a kind as to cling to the spectator's memory. And that all those working on the show should enjoy themselves».

The result was «Le Marché des petites heures» (Market at dawn).

The «Rideau de Bruxelles» did not confine its efforts to prospecting the rising Belgian generation ; it also gave the Belgian public perfor-

mances of plays by foreign writers whose work had never before been given in French — Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller, Christopher Fry, etc...

This work of prospecting the new playwrights was soon shared by another company. The «Théâtre de Poche» (Pocket Theatre), formed in 1951 by Roger Domani, has specialized in the avant-garde. The experiments which it has undertaken, and which are often bold in the extreme, have on occasion proved so successful as to swell to amazing proportions its usually restricted audience of students and intellectuals. Most surprising of all perhaps is it has been doing this deserving but hazardous work for over fifteen years.

In the years immediately after the war, the regular theatres such as the «Galerie», the «Parc», the «Théâtre Molière» in Brussels and the «Théâtre du Gymnase» in Liege, had all taken a far more conventional line. They devoted their talents to plays that had proved successful in Paris. But gradually they made more and more exceptions to this rule, and here too bolder ventures were undertaken from time to time.

Lastly, the «Gymnase» Theatre in Liege has in the past few years given a chance to many young Belgian writers, whose works have been included in the season's programme and carefully staged.

TRENDS IN PUBLIC TASTE

Where does the Belgian theatre stand today? In the first place, the difference between the various theatres is no longer as it was. Although the National Theatre is still doing pioneering work, chiefly in the matter of provincial tours, other companies too have adopted the prospecting methods which it originated. A similar phenomenon may be discerned in the matter of repertoire.

This is doubtless due to the constant advance in public taste. In 1958, when the «Théâtre des Galeries» broke with tradition and staged «Man for Man», the second of Bertold Brecht's works to be shown in Belgium, the spectators clearly did not comprehend it. When the National Theatre staged works such as «The Skin of our Teeth» by Thornton Wilder (1950), «The Cocktail Party» by T.S. Eliot (1952) or «The good soul of Se-Chuan», also by Brecht (1957), many in the audience were quite obviously disconcerted.

Since then, times have changed, and one may perhaps ask why. In the first place, theatre-going has increased. But another important factor, perhaps even a crucial factor, is the influence of television. This «window on to the world» is broadening the intellectual horizon of vast masses of people, is rendering them better informed and more receptive. This is appreciated particularly by the actors, many of whose subtle effects used to be lost on the

public and who now meet with a quick, penetrating reaction on the spectators' part. As a result, the «avant-garde» concept is gradually becoming meaningless.

The unadventurous character of the plays seen in the early years by companies such as the Theatre National, has become a thing of the past. Nowadays they can stage Brecht, Weill, Dürrenmatt, Schéhéhadé, Mrozec, and successfully attract large audiences. Theatres such as the «Galerie», «Parc», «Molière», «Gymnase» which used formerly to show only light comedy can now undertake ventures which at one time would have seemed bold in the extreme.

Thus both as regards plays and audiences the differences between Belgian theatres are far less noticeable. Obviously, neither the National Theatre nor the «Rideau» would stage «Les Filles» (The girls) by René Maran. It was such a triumph at the «Galerie» theatre in 1967. But, in addition to this light entertainment, the «Galerie» during the same season also presented «Les Séquestrés d'Altona» (Prisoners of Altona) by Sartre and «L'Écume» (Crusts) by Claudel.

At present the theatre in Belgium is on a plane. On the whole, it is doing well. Companies have sprung up in recent years: «L'Alliance», the «Théâtre de Quat'Sous», Claude Volter's company and «L'Ile à Louis» in Brussels, «L'Etude» in Liège. But

(1) It is worth mentioning the Théâtre du Rire, remarkable productions of «Barabbas» and «La Magie rouge» (Red magic) by de Ghelderode, 1968 and 1969.

...
into a framework that is already firmly established. Perhaps we are on the threshold of another revolution, but it is difficult to fore-see where it will come from...

There is still room for improvement. Differences have become larger, but they are confined to the upper and petty bourgeoisie, office workers, students and intellectuals. The working class still knows little or nothing about the theatre : the sole exceptions being a few attempts made by the National Theatre — theatrical weeks at La Louvière, Mons and Huy in 1968 and 1969, and the annual Spa Festival — together with the penetration in depth undertaken during the past many years by that brave roving company, Fernand Pilette's «Théâtre de l'Equipe».

THE ACTOR'S STATUS

As we have seen, the Belgian theatre is not doing badly, but what about the actors ?

In the past twenty years, they too have acquired a new dignity. Gone are the days when Paris was their only hope, when a career in Belgium meant a lifetime in obscurity. Some of course do still go to seek their fortune on the banks of the Seine. In this way Belgium has lost to the French theatre actors such as Raymond Gérôme, Jean-Jacques, Pierre Michaël, Françoise Giret, etc., and directors such as the late Stéphane Ariel or Pierre Debauche. But these cases have by now become the exception rather than the rule.

In the first place, an actor now finds better training facilities in Belgium. In addition to the Academies of Dramatic Art, special colleges have been established for the benefit of young actors and directors : the «Institut National Supérieur des Arts du Spectacle» (INSAS - Higher National Institute for the Performing arts) and the «Institut des Arts de Diffusion» (IAD - Institute for the Disseminating arts). True, an actor's first steps are not always easy, but this is the case in other professions too.

In Belgium nowadays a capable actor can work and earn a good living. But in this case «work» is the operative word, for to make a living he has to function almost non-stop. There are far more theatres than before, and there are worth-while openings too in radio, television

and film dubbing. Earnings however are relatively low and, to make ends meet, actors must be prepared to rush from job to job, from the television studio or film laboratory to a rehearsal or actual performance of his play ; in addition he may be teaching in a special school or he may be giving private tuition. An exhausting timetable of this kind is obviously not ideal.

In Brussels, plays are usually performed for three weeks or a month. Thanks to its tours out of town, the National Theatre may keep the same play on for two even three months. However, the «Gymnase» in Liege puts on a different play every week. Two months is little enough, but to prepare a show in only a week (and often very successfully too) is a remarkable feat. Matters can only be improved by finding more theatre-goers — but how ?

Much remains to be done to regulate the pace of work and also to provide actors with greater security. Much has already been done to improve their status. Belgian actors are increasingly aware of the fact that they occupy an important place in society. Occasionally they may even be regarded as their country's representatives. Every year, Belgian companies undertake tours abroad : the National Theatre travels to South America or the Lebanon, the «Rideau» to Spain or the U.S.S.R., while the «Parc» may perform in Poland. Both the National Theatre and the «Rideau» performed most successfully at the Montreal World's Fair.

Lastly, it should be noted that the Brussels theatre critics award an annual prize to the best actor and actress, and that there is a special prize every third year for the best direc-

tor. The handing over of these «Eves du Théâtre» (Theatrical Eves) has become something of a ceremonial occasion.

As we have seen, all is not yet perfect on the Thespian scene in Belgium, but extraordinary progress has been achieved in little more than twenty years.

PREFERENCE SYSTEM

Already explained, there is less and less in the image of Brussels as an outpost of Paris. Except on one point and this is one that calls for explanation.

The matter was put very concisely by Georges Lemaire in an article which he wrote for the 1960 issue of the quarterly «Théâtre dans le monde» :

« members of the French-speaking community we suffer from a form of centralization that does not in fact affect us. Owing to a perfectly legal system of preference covering «the French language countries», most of the new plays staged in Paris are not available to us much later. This means that we cannot show them in our theatres while they are still new. We have to wait until their success in Paris has been exhausted, and often also until a touring French company has used the preference while performing in Belgium cities. I know that Port Royal or L'Hurluberlu (The better-brain) are being performed in Berlin, Copenhagen or Helsinki at a time when Belgian theatres, because they are French-speaking, have to forgo the opportunity. We can see these very same plays, in Brussels or Antwerp, in Dutch-language theatres, because these are translated versions ! Three or four years later, as the very last among all those who want to produce living plays, we are finally allowed to think of «reviving» them...»

These barriers which hinder the Belgian theatre cover not only original French plays. They also

cover many foreign plays which are first performed, or which it is proposed to premiere in French, on the banks of the Seine, even if they are relatively old plays.

There is no need to stress how deplorable a position this is. We shall see however that, besides these major drawbacks, the system does provide one minor advantage...

PARIS, AN OUTPOST OF BRUSSELS ?

It has almost become a truism to say that Belgium is a crossroads, that it is a country where several cultures meet.

In addition to the Dutch culture, with which they are in constant touch through the intermediary of their Flemish countrymen, French-speaking Belgians are influenced not only by the French culture, but also by the English (and hence also the American) and Germanic cultures.

We understand our northern neighbours better than the French can. We feel more concerned than they do by what is happening in Great Britain, the U.S.A., Germany, Central and Eastern Europe.

In the theatre, this inquiring bent of mind is conducive to direct advantages. In the matter of foreign plays, Belgian theatres have to keep ahead of Paris, and stage the latest productions from London, New York, Munich or Bratislava before the French. Otherwise it is too

late, and the preference system comes into

operation. This system therefore does have an advantage in that it compels Belgian producers to be on the alert and to move boldly.

Belgians are better than the French at understanding foreign mentalities. Whereas a Paris adaptation will «Frenchify» an English or German text, turning it into a «Paris product», a Belgian adaptation will remain truer to the original. When it is translated into French by a Belgian, an English play will remain English, a German play German. In this respect, Brussels is ahead of Paris. It was Brussels that gave the first performances in French of works by Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Christopher Fry, James Saunders, Arnold Wesker, Robert Bolt, Max Frisch, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, Robert Shaw, Dario Fo, etc...

This is perhaps the most eloquent proof of the vitality of the Belgian theatre. Some French journalists have realized this, and they now travel to Brussels, to Liège, or to the National Theatre's annual festival at Spa, to cover French-language premieres. A wag might be tempted to say that, from time to time, Paris belongs to provincial Belgium.

* * *

In these few lines, we have drawn a doubtless very incomplete picture of the French language theatre in Belgium. But it should be remembered that it is the author who is the vital factor in the theatre. Let us therefore take a look at this crucial element in the active and enterprising Belgian theatrical world: the Belgian playwright.

THE WRITERS

Presentation

Is there such a thing as a Belgian French language playwright? Is it not more likely he is a French playwright who, by mere chance, was born and is still living in Belgium?

To ask this question, is to query the very basis of Belgian national existence. Belgium merely an administrative community; consider the many efforts that have been made to make it survive as a nation, as a country sharing similar customs, ideas and ambitions. Willy nilly, the four to five million French speaking Belgians live alongside their Flemish countrymen, and vice versa. This shared marriage that has endured for centuries has, despite the difference in language, created a common awareness: Flemings, Walloons and Bruxellois (for there are three parts to this marriage!) share the same virus, the same customs and the same cultural life.

It is a fact that every Flemish writer has assimilated something of the French culture, that every Belgian author writing in French, even pure Walloons like Georges Simenon or Marcel Thiry — have assimilated some Flemish.

Every Belgian writer is a divided man, within him something of the Brueghel and something of the Admirable Rutgers.

THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM

— physical anxiety and mysticism on the one hand, intense sensuality on the other hand.

The flame of Jerome Bosch, the blue of Roger de la Pasture; joy unbridled, such as Rik Witters depicted in his statuary.

Sometimes the two elements are combined: pushed to its zenith sensuality becomes another aspect of the basic anguish, while the actors and torments of the quest for the absolution are garbed in the accessories of the kingdom of the senses — flesh, draped cloth, colour, light and masks.

Belgian theatre is not light or frivolous in character: it is a theatre of struggle.

There is a language problem too. «Every Belgian writer — says Paul Willems — thinks nostalgically of the nations with great cultures, where language springs from the people. Fortunate France, where Malherbe could say that «The porters of Port-au-Foin are our language masters». In Belgium, our masters would be the tram-drivers».

Alluding to the contemporary playwright, Paul Willens adds:

«For each of his works he has to invent a time, a place and a language. Contemporary plays cull their material from reality and submit it to their own laws. This is where the Belgian playwright faces an additional problem.

The language in his play cannot be based on Belgian life. In order to ring true, it must be transposed. The problem affects every smallest detail down to the names of the characters. If a Frenchman calls one of his characters Monsieur Dupont, this indicates his place in society and the type of language he speaks. The same goes for Mr. Smith in England or for Herr Müller in Germany. We in Belgium have only M. Beulemans».

The Belgian theatre is not, and cannot be realistic. Realism here has to be confined to plays written in dialect, either as part of the Brussels or Walloon theatre (1).

(1) One important contribution to dialect writing was «Le Mariage de Mademoiselle Beulemans» (The Wedding of Miss Beulemans), by Fonson and Wichele, a play whose continued appeal was confirmed by its recent successful revival by the «Compagnie des Galeries» (Galleries Company).

Belgian plays therefore are set either in a more or less imaginary historic setting (there

are many historic plays, with fine costumes as an added attraction), or abroad, or nowhere: in a drawing room, in an inn, a forest... The setting is never Brussels, Wallonia or the banks of the Scheldt, but an Ardennes forest or the banks of a river that has sprung from the poet's mind. In a kingdom which is not quite Flemish nor Walloon, the kingdom of Kings Crommelynck and Ghelderode. And this brings us back to our narrative.

We have to select a starting point, say 1945. Sadly this means that we sacrifice Maeterlinck and Crommelynck, neither of whom had any new play performed after that date. But it does include Ghelderode, who flourished as a writer in both the post-war periods. Let us start with him.

MICHEL DE GELDERODE

De Ghelderode's biography is a brief one. Achille-Achémard-Louis-Michel Martens was born at Ixelles, on 3 April 1898. The man who wrote under the name Michel de Ghelderode died at his home, in the rue Lefranc in Schaerbeek, which was filled with masks, models of puppets, on 1 April 1963. Between these dates he had, in order to make a living, been employed as an archivist by the municipality of Schaerbeek; and, to offset the suffering inflicted on him by his precarious health, he wrote short stories, essays and some plays.

He had his first play performed in 1918: it was a «poetic» one-act play called «*La Mort regardant à la fenêtre*» (Death looks in at the window). In 1925, he met Johan de Meester, was the leader and director of the «Vlaams Volkstoneel».

It was this theatre which premiered (in Dutch translation) the first great works by this Flemish French-language writer: «*La Farce mort qui faillit trépasser*» (The farce of dead man who almost died - 1925); «*Images de la vie de saint François*» (Scenes from the life of Saint Francis - 1927) which caused furore in some of the places in which it was performed; «*Barabbas*» (1929) and «*Pégaleze*» (1930). His plays were performed in French too: at the «Parc» theatre, at the «tailion» and elsewhere. Mostly to a ill audience, and to the delight of his friends: and Crommelynck, Max Deauville, James sor, Camille Poupeye, Franz Hellens...



«Mademoiselle Jaïre»
by Michel de Ghelderode.

Success came suddenly, on 13 June 1947. At

the «Théâtre de l'Œuvre» in Paris, the company headed by Catherine Toth and André Reybaz presented two plays by this hitherto unknown author : «*Hop Signor!*» and «*Le Ménage de Caroline*» (Caroline's household).

They were hailed as a revelation ! Ghelderode had been discovered and soon his plays were being produced everywhere, in France, in Belgium, all over the world ; his complete works were published. The picture would not have been complete without a whiff of scandal — there were shouts and actual fighting during the premiere of «*Festes d'enfer*» (The pageant of hell), at the Marigny Theatre on 20 October 1949.

A strange destiny indeed, the destiny of an outstanding writer.

De Ghelderode is a Belgian, first and foremost. A writer of this kind is only conceivable in Belgium. He writes in French, although he is fundamentally Flemish. He himself has remarked that :

«This is one of the peculiarities of my country, which has such an aptitude for physical pleasures, and which is capable frenetic rejoicing at every opportunity. The Flemish nation, in which I am rooted, has dual character: superbly vital and materialistic, it likes at the same time to indulge in metaphysical anxiety and to cultivate a taste for the macabre, a taste which it shares with great people like the Spaniards, who have similar inclination to mingle death with everyday life, but in a manner more absolute».

An aptitude for the physical pleasures. Thus Ghelderode's art is not rooted in the brain but aims to awaken the senses. First and foremost the sense of sight : shapes, colours and light which stand out even more as they are played against a backdrop of darkness ; influence of Flemish and Spanish painters Brueghel, El Greco, Jerome Bosch and Velázquez ; an emphasis on the human form, not much the form itself but everything that simulates the human form or grimaces : statues, masks, puppets, android objects, those that are alleged to work spells or magic.

Nor does he neglect the sense of hearing, smell, touch or taste. The flesh is everywhere — in the form of gluttony, guzzling and

A FLEMISH WRITER

The nostrils quiver in response to aromas that prove even more attractive as they are soon blunted by the sulphur vapours of Hell, by the effluvium of Death.

THIRST IN DE GHELDERODE'S WORKS

Thirst of the senses and of Death, these are the two mainstays of de Ghelderode's works. As Jean Francis has written so aptly (1) : «...if, in all his plays, one had to choose the most important moment, the most terrible, most dramatic and also most characteristic moment, one would doubtless select the hallucinating scene in «Barabbas», when thirst tortures the bandit and his two henchmen while in another corner, Jesus, prostate, waits and prays. Thirst ! His sulphur-flavoured plays, his carnal, biting and convulsed writing, which scrapes the throat and burns the chest, is dominated entirely by Thirst. One might even say longing, in so far as Thirst is a need rather than a privation. A longing for wine in «Barabbas» ; for gold in «Magie Rouge» (Red magic) ; for justice in «Pantagleize» ; for women and the liberating orgasm in «La Farce des Ténébreux» (The farce of the hypocrites) ; for personality

in «Don Juan» ; for escape in «Christophe Colomb» (Christopher Columbus) ; for objective conscience in «La Mort du Docteur Faust» (The Death of Doctor Faustus) ; a longing to guzzle, to enjoy life, to drink, to forget Heaven and Hell. Lust, Gluttony, Fury, Avarice, the seven deadly sins lead the dance of the mask unleashed by Jerome Bosch from Brabant».

This thirst, in de Ghelderode's view, is an integral part of the human condition. It is a constant torture, a hopeless torment. The artist's duty is to describe it, to depict its every grimace and contortion. In «L'Ecole des Buffons» (School for buffoons) the master-jester Chevalier Folial tells his pupils :

— In truth I tell you... The secret of our art, of great art, of every art that wants to last ? The answer is CRU-EL-TY !

Inevitably, this thirst leads to Death.

(1) Jean Francis : «Michel de Ghelderode, dramaturge des pays de par-deça», (1949).

THE PRESENCE OF DEATH

A CONTEMPORARY WRITER

Whatever form it may take, lust, gluttony, avarice, this thirst may well represent the thirst for death. In «*Hop Signor!*», we can watch this monstrous alliance as it materialises. Marguerite Harstein is the maiden wife of the deformed old sculptor Jureal, who is nicknamed «hell's showman». Desire lurks all around her, the desire of the monk Don Pilar, the desire of two young noblemen who kill each other for her. But this lecherous virgin girl is keeping herself for another lover. Her thirst is not quenched until she receives death from the hands of the executioner Larose. The stake becomes her bridal couch. It is the same frenzy that urges Purmelende d'Ostrelande, a wild young noblewoman, toward Halewyn, the Flemish werewolf, the killer of virgins who, having possessed them, hangs them naked, leaving them to turn blue and to rot in the wind. But at the last moment, the girl's noble blood speaks up. She kills the evil lover before the act, and she can be seen galloping back to her father's castle, bearing Halewyn's head aloft. But before she hands this dreadful trophy to the old Duke of Ostrelande, she kisses the dead lips and she in turn dies of this kiss.

In the World of Ghelderode, death is omnipresent : shapes risen from the sepulchre, like «*Mademoiselle Jaire*» or men convulsed on the edge of death, like bishop Eremo in «*Fastes d'enfer*». In this latter play, the chorus of archdeacons with gargoyles' heads shouts, with sombre detestation :

— The dead stink... the living too !

De Ghelderode emerged at the right time. Wor king completely alone for thirty years, he invented everything that has since become the substance of the modern theatre. His theatre is the «theatre of cruelty» foreshadowed another great precursor, Antonin Artaud.

With his clowns, sneering jesters, and dazed fools, his work represents the theatre of desperation, the theatre of the absurd. «Barabbas» who wants to engulf the world in an ocean of blood and fire in order to avenge the death of the Just, is stabbed obscurely by a fairground buffoon, Pantegleize, the bewildered poet, seen off a revolution with his innocent remark «*What a lovely day!*» and is shot to death without understanding his fate.

Something should be said too about de Ghelderode's language. It is a language that has been wrought afresh, rich in archaisms, neologisms words borrowed from the Flemish, noise echoes and flying images. It contains bursts of verbal delirium that are reminiscent of Aliberti, Beckett or Ionesco.

Something should be said too about the extraordinary performance of «*Le Jeu de Marie Misérable*» (The pageant of poor Mary), which had been commissioned by the authorities of Woluwé-Saint-Lambert and which was first shown there, in 1952, on the square in front of the church. With its cavalcades, epic surges of bewildered people, its parades of giants, it was a resurrection of the great mystery plays of old.

HERMAN CLOSSON

more should be said about his work, «*Escurial*», about «*Le Ménage de Caro*»; about «*Masques ostendais*» (Masks from Ostend) «*La Ballade du Grand Macabre, singes*» (The Ballad of the great Macabre, of the Blind)...

Helderode created his own universe. These notes can hope to give no more than a faint image of it. There are other Believers waiting in the wings...

Herman Closson is three years younger than Helderode. He was born in Brussels in 1901. He too succeeded in creating his own universe. Music was his first love. He began as a music critic and secretary of the International Music Society. But soon he switched his allegiance to the theatre, and began to write plays. He taught Theatrical History and the Technique of the Theatre. He also became a respected critic and the author of treatises such as «*De l'art dramatique*» (Of dramatic art); «*Le Théâtre, cet inconnu*» (The theatre as an unknown); «*Le Comédien*» (The actor). He then adapted many English and German plays: «*The Merchant of Venice*», a first French version of Arthur Miller's «*The Crucible*» (*La Chasse aux Sorcières*) which, for the accuracy of its rendering, is to be preferred to Marcel Aymé's «*Sorcières de Salem*» (The witches of Salem), etc.

Closson's first play dates from 1925, and was called «*Sous-sol*» (Basement). This was followed by «*Spectacle ou la Comédie du Public*» (Spectacle, or the public's comedy) which was dated 1928 and, in 1935, by «*Godefroid de Bouillon*», which was first performed by the «*Rideau gris*» of Marseille with a cast including two unknowns, Louis Ducreux and André Roussin.

With this latter play — which caused a furore in Belgium, because of its irreverent treatment of a national hero — the writer proved his sta-

ture. He had by then developed a style which Suzanne Lilar defines as follows : (1)

«His nervous, sobre language, fearfully effective in its speed and sword-like precision, occasionally becomes more human, revealing the chink in his armour, but soon resumes its usual taut and violent tempo».

Let us try to discern, play by play, what Clossen's ethics are.

BECOMING LEGENDARY...

Shakespeare, the hero of «*William ou la Comédie de l'Aventure*» (William or the Comedy of adventure), written in 1938, exclaims :

— You must try to be human, to touch always on essentials, but what is it that is human in man ?

This question is one that most of Clossen's characters ask themselves : what is it that is essential in themselves ? This quest for the truth about a human being, beyond surface appearances and everyday problems, could perhaps he said to owe a lot to Pirandello. Clossen likes disguises, false impressions, all

the aspects of illusion, which causes everyone to form their own particular image of other people. In «*Sire Halewyn*» (1955) the first Héwyn to present himself to the audience is false Halewyn, and in «*Borgia*» (1945), it is false Borgia.

Step by step, however, he forges this Nietzschean reply : that which is human in man that which transcends him, the legend emanates from him.

«*La Passante illuminée*» (The illuminated passer-by - 1939) is about a young woman, Lucie, who is isolated on an island with three men. Each of them has his own idea about this woman he desires, for whom he thirsts and hungers. To each of them, she is the heroine of a personal erotic dream, which he is burning to fulfil. At last she makes her choice and selects the youngest of her three suitors, Philippe. Together they decide to flee to Europe. But as they are about to embark, Philippe leaves this woman to whom he had looked complete fulfilment. The dream has died, the light of reality. The young man leaves a woman who is too real and returns to his companions to find anew the ideal woman, their shared dream.

Having become legendary, the dream of the three lone men has at last become real.

(1) Suzanne Lilar : «Soixante ans de théâtre belge»
(La Renaissance du Livre, 1952).

ETHICS OF RENUNCIATION

which is real in a Closson hero, is an idea stage. This image is the more intense escapes from the debasing effect of the Listen to Frédérique, the virgin who Halewyn and killed him before their love filled :

which I have not known is so wonderful Already the memory of it is growing, I wait the day when I shall be sure at last at it all happened.. Halewyn and I, today we begin to live together.

Closson's characters moves from sacrifice to renunciation to renunciation. Borgia renounces his only love, Lucifer's destiny lies elsewhere : to be Caesar, leader, the maker of the people. That tempted Godefroid in the Crusade, was venture, feats of arms, the discovery of unknown lands, and also the love of the hand Amazon who accompanied him. Geneveieve, He renounces all of this, just as in the scene he can be seen to discard his arms coat of mail : «I go to the tomb of Christ». Genevieve, who wants to accompany him, says : «Forgive me... Let me make my end clear».

Enoise de Gaillemarde, the adventuress in «Preuve du feu» (Trial by fire - 1944), poses typically as Joan of Arc escaped from the sake at Rouen. Her imposture proves successful, but a character is born within her who pre-

vants her enjoying her ridiculous achievement; having posed continually as Joan of Arc, she becomes Joan of Arc ; she dies because she can no longer perform her role, because she ends up believing in it.

Let us recall also the last scene of «Le Jeu des Quatre Fils Aymon» (The play of the four brothers Aymon - 1941). The four knights from the Ardennes, whose adventures we have shared throughout the play, are replaced by four superhuman statues ; meanwhile two choristers chant the Ardennes verse-chronicle :

— Fiery land of Walloon blood — they are alive, your sons Aymon !

Sublimated in this way the four brothers are at last fully alive.

THE WRITER'S ROLE

One character of major importance in several of Closson's works is that of the writer, who might be described as a professional creator of legends.

What an awe-inspiring craft it is. If those who tackle it are proved wanting, they are the object of mockery and scorn.

Man of letters ; becomes an insult, both in «Sire Halewyn» and in a riotous farce based on the legend of Lady Godiva, «La Farce des deux nus» (Farce of the two nudes - 1943). The

comic monk who is the chronicler of the

Aymon Brothers witnesses some stupendous feats ; but when he wants to relate them he resorts to clichés and pleonasmis. Here it is the Ardennes people which is the true creator of legend, the woodmen, peasants and shepherds. Closson has also depicted a real man of letters : Shakespeare as he appears in «*William ou la Comédie de l'Aventure*» (William or the Comedy of Adventure). We watch him as he lives in a low Elizabethan tavern, the lair of whores, thieves and murderers. These are the raw materials with which this «writing machine» constructs his theatre. The entire play oscillates between two levels, or even three : real life, the theatre, and the theatre within the theatre, that fictitious existence which comes to life during rehearsals. Shakespeare's brain transforms those around him : the son of a goldsmith in York street becomes Hamlet, an old beggar is turned into King Lear. Every incident, down to the most vulgar or trivial, is transmuted into poetry. In the middle of a quarrel, a dangerous hooligan shouts at Shakespeare : «Shut up !»

And Shakespeare marvels : «Shut up ! The splendour of the conventional retort !»

PAGEANTRY AND EROTICISM...

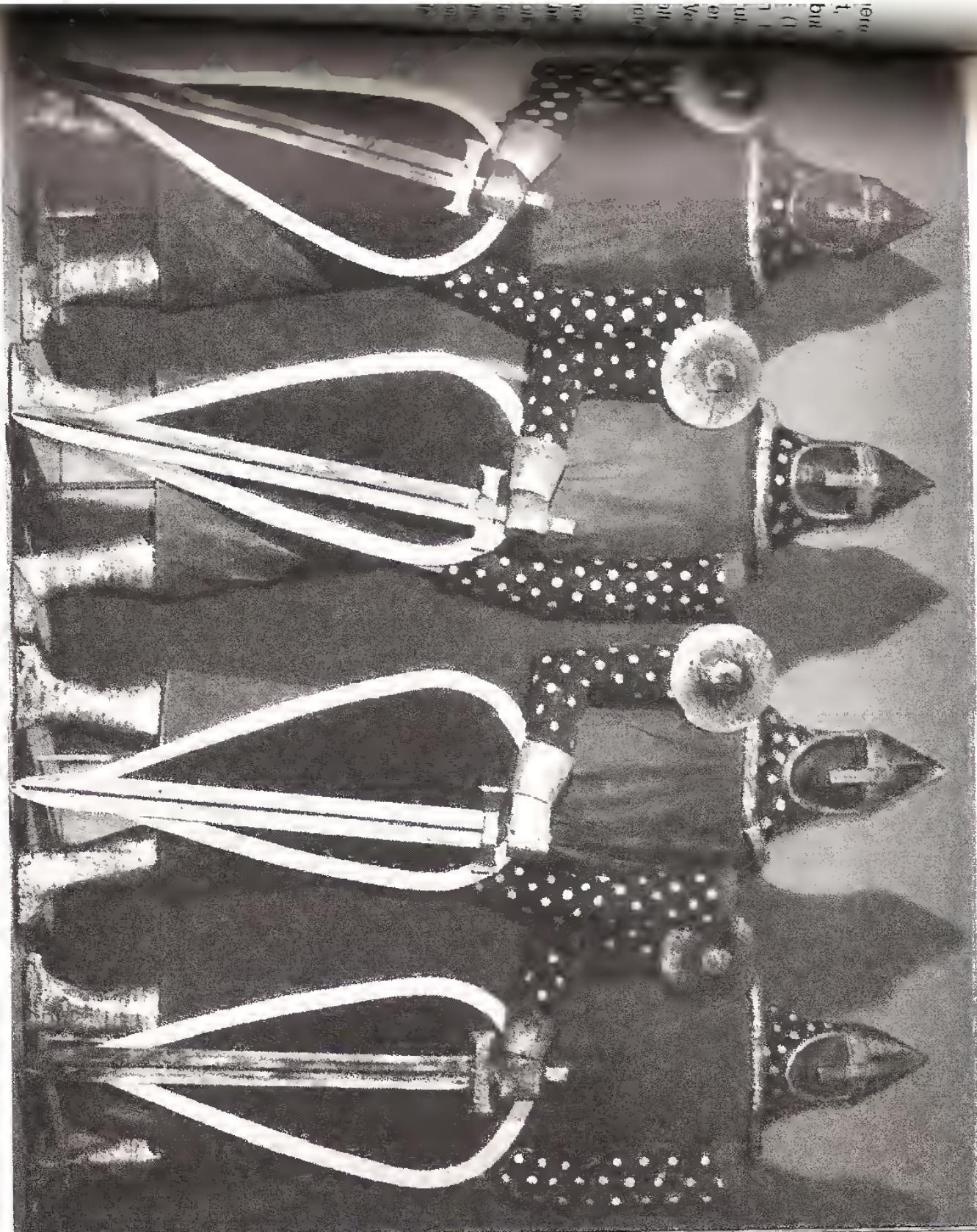
There are many facets to Closson. There Closson the great popular playwright, author not only of the Aymon Brothers but other pageants such as «*Le Jeu de Han*» (Han pageant), which was performed in world-famous grotto in 1948 ; or the petit melodrama «*Yolande de Beersel*» (at Beersel Castle in 1950), and an amusing satire of Viernes, intended for adolescent audiences, called «*Le Spectre du Bison blanc*» (The spectre of the white bison - 1943).

Closson's eroticism has at times given offence even though it is essentially cerebral in character. It is present in the author's last work «*Le Meublé*» (The furnished apartment), which has not as yet been performed. It is perhaps surprising that he has not given us his version of *Don Juan*, but in fact all of Closson's characters contain something of *Don Juan*. Then there is Closson the creator of haughty inaccessible amazons, armed from top to Yolande in the Aymon Brothers, Geneva, Godetroid, and the invulnerable yet too vulnerable heroines of «*Sang de l'Amazone*» (Blood of the Amazon - 1950).

Closson, in short, is a writer who is both individual and extremely demanding.

* * *

There are other playwrights who belong to the period between the wars and to post-war era. Most of them are novelists



"The Lymon Brothers" by Herman Closson.

have been tempted occasionally to write plays.

They include : Pierre Nothomb, with a biblical drama «*Izac*», published in 1962 ; Roger Avermaete : «*La Visite* (The visit) and «*Le miracle*» (The miracle) in 1950, «*La guerre de la Vache*» (War for a cow) in 1964 and «*Quand le Diable s'en mêle*» (When the devil interferes) ; Alexis Curvers with «*Ce vieil Oedipe*» (Old Oedipus, 1947) ; O.P. Gilbert with «*Mollenard*», 1961 ; Marie-Thérèse Bodart with «*Et Adam répondit*» (And Adam replied, 1947) and «*Le monde éclatera demain*» (The world explodes tomorrow, 1952) ; Charles Plisnier with «*Hospitalité*» (Hospitality, 1948) ; and Antoine Lepage with «*Faust*» and «*Don Juan*» in 1960 and «*Jeanne, fille de France ?*» (Joan, daughter of France ?) in 1962).

THE SNOW WAS TAINTED Now for Simenon.

This Belgian from Liege, born in 1903, published over two hundred novels. He is most widely read living writer. He has written only one play, in collaboration with a Frenchman, Frédéric Dard. But this play, «*La neige était sale*» (The snow was tainted), first performed at the «*Théâtre de l'Œuvre*» in Paris in 1950, is an important one.

The action is set in a country that is occupied by a foreign army. It is wintertime. People are hungry, cold and afraid. Many are arrested and shot. But the worst thing of all is the rot caused by poverty and the soldiers' presence. One of the characters says :

— It won't snow again tonight. The old stuff is tainted. It's becoming repulsive.

The character who speaks this line is young Frank. He himself is a perfect symbol of widespread dirt and corruption. His mother, elderly prostitute, runs a brothel in which she mightily come to be entertained by girls reduced to this extremity through hunger. Frank leads the life of a parasite and a voyeur in aggressively luxurious apartment. In order to impress his hooligan friend Kromer, he kills warrant-officer, quite gratuitously, for no particular reason. Then he kills an old woman, in order to steal from her. He goes from bad to worse. In the same house, there lives Mr. Holst with his daughter Sissy.

* * *

Holst used to be a well-known art critic, now he is driving a tram. Frank seduces Sissy. Then, though sheer desperation, in order to save a love of which he does not feel worthy, wants to pass the girl on to his friend Kroes. Sissy flees, half-naked, into the snow. She caught back and catches pneumonia, which first kills her.

Only after this exploit Frank is arrested. Though he had not realized it, his black market operations had brought him into contact with members of the resistance. The interrogators want him to denounce them. He is imprisoned in a school that has been turned into a prison, and from which hostages are taken every morning to be shot. From the classroom in which he is locked up, he can see a window at the distance, with clothes drying, a cot and simple people who are living, as well as they can, who are still trying to live. He only wants to die.

Attempting to break down his resistance, the emaciated old official who is his interrogator allows him to see Mr. Holst and Sissy, whose health is at last on the mend. Sissy tells Frank :

— I came to tell you that I love you.

And Mr. Holst adds :

— Even when there is no war, the job of being a man is always difficult... It is always difficult, and not everyone succeeds.

When they are gone, Frank realizes what this meeting means for him : that he has been forgiven, that he is loved.

* * *

With Simenon, we have moved into the realm of Belgian playwrights who live abroad, those whose capital is no longer Brussels or Liege, but Paris. Yet how Belgian they remain, if only through their quest for the absolute !

Of this group, four more names should be mentioned : Claude Spaak, Denis Marion, José-André Lacour, Félicien Marceau.

CLAUDE SPAAK

Claude Spaak was born in Brussels in 1904. His father was the playwright Paul Spaak (1870-1936) — the author of «Kaatje», of «Malgré ceux qui tombent» (In spite of those who fall), of some excellent adaptations of Shakespeare, etc., and who was also the director of the Royal Monnaie Theatre. Paul Spaak's sons made outstanding careers in very different fields : Paul-Henri in politics, Charles as a writer for the screen (1) and Claude as a playwright, like his father.

Having worked first in the plastic arts department at the «Palais des Beaux Arts», he then moved to Paris, where his first play was performed. «L'Auberge des apparences» (The inn of pretences) was presented by Marcel Herrand at the «Comédie des Champs-Elysées» during the 1937 Exhibition (the performances were disturbed at 10 every night by the fireworks display). Since then, his plays have been performed constantly on the Paris and Brussels stage. The titles are as follows :

In productions by Marcel Herrand : «L'Ecole de la médisance» (School for scandal) after Sheridan (1940) and «Primavera» (1946). At the Belgian National Theatre : «Rossignols de Castille» (Nightingales from Castile) and «La Rose des Vents» (The wind rose) in 1953. At the «Vieux-Colombier» : «L'Absent» (The absent one) and «L'Heure sonnera» (The hour will strike) in 1950, «Le Pain blanc» (White bread) in 1957 and «Soleil de Minuit» (The midnight sun) in 1959. Lastly, at the «Athénée», in 1962 :

«Trois fois le jour ou Le Onzième Commandement» (Three times daily, or the eleventh commandment).

Radio and television in France, Belgium and other countries have also presented the following :

«Carmagnola» ; «Le Pont des Soupirs» (bridge of sighs) ; «Printemps en octobre» (Spring in October) ; «Le Temps des adieux» (A time for farewells) ; «Dans un miroir» (the looking-glass), etc...

Spaak is a highly fertile writer, whose works are often very successful. A very varied writer and rightly ambitious.

He can write an attractive comedy in the manner of the Spanish Golden Century, like «Les Rossignols de Castille». He can depict the struggle of a young woman against the memory of her dead husband, as in «L'Absent». In a technically accomplished play like «La Rose des Vents» he can describe all the facets, even the possible aspect of a great love, showing even the tender and cruel truth which it involves.

But above all, Claude Spaak is fascinated by the problems that confront present-day man.

(1) He adapted one of his films as a very pleasant comedy, «Premier Bal» (First Ball), which was shown at the «Théâtre des Galeries» in 1947.

SMALL SOLITARY FLAME...

13 October, Calas lit a candle in the passage of his house and told his wife : «There will be light when we return home».

I have often thought of this solitary little flame while writing «*Trois fois le jour*», a flame which, far from dying out in a few hours, went on shining forcefully, thanks to Voltaire. Since then, it has gone on lighting the conscience of all men, believers and unbelievers, who regard «thou shalt be tolerant» as the eleventh commandment».

Claude Spaak has always used his great dramatic talent to serve the cause of this *light*. He knows how to construct a story, to make his characters into flesh-and-blood people. His dialogue rings true and clear.

* * *

The following quotation from Spaak's introduction to this play explains his ethics perfectly :

«We know that, on 13 October 1761, the police came to arrest Calas, who was wrongly accused of having strangled his son because he wanted to be converted to Catholicism. The old man himself was a Calvinist.

He was condemned to death, the victim of religious passions and in spite of his constant denials. But as he was led away to prison on

DENIS MARION AND HUMAN JUSTICE

«One trait in Denis Marion's character is that he can lie to no one».

This is culled from «*Mes Inscriptions*» (My notes) by the poet Louis Scutenaire. If this man «who can lie to no one» lives away from his country, this is because he is a journalist, and his job keeps him in Paris.

A theatre and film critic (1), occasionally a fierce political polemicist (as shown by his collected articles «*Billets durs*» (Hard notes) published shortly before the war), he has also written: a novel; a study of Daniel Defoe; some wonderful imaginary dialogues between Socrates and his disciples, Mozart and Grimm, Dostoevsky and his beloved Anna ("Les Maskes du Destin" - The masks of destiny), etc. etc...

One of the problems that haunt this man, who was born in Brussels in 1906 and who worked as a barrister for close on twenty years, is the problem of human justice. The two plays by him which have been performed so far, both hinge on this problem.

The first, «*Le juge de Malte*» (The judge of Malta), which was shown at the «Théâtre Montparnasse» in Paris in 1948, describes a very odd case. It takes place in Malta, in the 18th century. Pietro the baker is caught by a patrol bending over a murdered man. He appears before the Judge Cambo, who is his customer and who is in a mild way courting the baker's wife. So the poor man, who is completely innocent, believes himself to be in good hands.

But when he appeals to the judge's friends, the latter refuses blankly. He extracts a confession from Pietro under torture and sentences him to death by hanging. Fortunately, Pietro has been condemned. He claims that, from his window, Judge Cambo observed the whole affair.

When the Grand Master of Malta voices surprise that Cambo had the unfortunate condemned in spite of this, knowing him to be completely innocent, our man replies:

— Who knew of it? Cambo, the private individual, the owner of a house in the Borghese, perhaps. But not the magistrate. I could not take into account that which I knew as a private individual.

In his indignation, the Grand Master forces Cambo to pay Pietro 10,000 ducats compensation, and to resign his office. Whereupon judge of Malta exclaims :

— By punishing me as you have done, you have committed the most monstrous judicial error of all time!»

Is it certain that there are no «judges of Malta» in our present Law Courts? «*L'Affaire Fualdes*» (The Fualdes affair), which was performed at the «Vieux-Colombier»,

(1) Not content to be a critic, he also served André Malraux's assistant during the production of the film «L'Espoir» (Hope).

JOSE-ANDRE LACOUR

In 1950, relates a well-known murder that committed at Rodez in 1817, and the trial. The play is amusingly constructed - the manner of an old-fashioned melodrama, it turns around the astounding mythical character of Clarissa Manson.

and contradicting herself constantly, this imaginative young woman was the principal witness for the prosecution, and she sent again incites us to meditate on the fragile nature of innocent people to the scaffold.

again incites us to meditate on the fragile nature of human justice !

* * *

But back to the theatre.

In 1943, the «Rideau de Bruxelles» gave the first performance of «Tristan». More than a play, this is a poem in dialogue, filled with a fiery, carnal lyricism. The drama of Tristan, torn as he is between two Isoldes, the Fair one, and the one with the White Hands, is a magnificent chant, interrupted by moments of great dramatic tension.

Lacour went to Paris to find his fortune and, in order to make a living, turned out vast numbers of cow-boy stories, but he also went on writing for the theatre.

Two harsh, implacable melodramas achieved an encouraging measure of success : «Notre peau» (Our skin), shown at the Paris «Théâtre

José-André Lacour was born at Gilly, near Charleroi, in 1919. In 1938, his first poems were awarded a prize by the review «L'Avant-Poste». Shortly after, with Alain Bosquet, he founded the review «Pylone».

His first novel «Panique en Occident» (Panic in the West) was published in Brussels in 1943 but banned in France by the German censorship. Inspired by the exodus of 1940, filled with noise and fury, with all the errors and genial characteristics of extreme youth, it heralded the advent of a vigorous writer. Other novels followed, including «La mort en ce jardin» (Death in this garden), of which Bunuel made such a good film, the poignant «Venise en octobre» (Venice in October), etc. etc...

MARTINI



«L'Année du Bac» by José-André Laca

Œuvre» in 1950, and «*Le temps nous a*» (we got us) which won the Enghien Prize of Dramatic Literature in 1952.

Edy «*O, mes aieux !*» (O, my forefathers), staged at the «*Œuvre*» in 1953, was not so received.

The same «*L'année du Bac*» (The sixth-form which has been acclaimed all over the world and which in 1958 had simultaneous performances at the Belgian National Theatre (directed by Jacques Huismans) and at the *Œuvre Edouard VII* in Paris (directed by Robert).

Terrenoire understand their son, Mic. Listen as Father Terrenoire speaks to his wife :

— You know, even if we of our generation try to be pally with the young ones, for them we must be part of the Museum of Antiquity. I don't wear stiff collars and you can dance the cha-cha-cha better than a college girl, but we are still classified as parents — another world — the far slope of life.

This puts the problems squarely.

Mic is lucky, luckier than other boys of his generation in the same play. There is Micky, a girl who has been left to her own devices by her mother, and who takes her revenge by doing the strip-tease, free of charge, at the parties to which she is invited. Then there is Cachou, whose father is a down-trodden teacher and whose mother is a deeply embittered woman.

But especially there are the children of the retired general Guiraud-Gobit, Jacques and Evelyne. A real hero, a general ! To make heroes of his children too, he gives them a tough, military upbringing. Until the day it comes out that, in 1940, the general behaved as a complete coward.

Jacques Guiraud-Jobit kills himself when he learns the truth about his father. Mic feels desperate over the death of his friend ; he too has lost some of his illusions about his father. But Evelyne tells him :

— Good heavens, Mic, seeing the qualities you expect of fathers, I wonder which of you would be worthy of becoming one...

L'ANNÉE DU BAC, THE PANGS OF YOUTH

«*L'année du Bac*», (literally, the year of the baccalauréat), when it appeared in 1958, heralded the youth explosion, a phenomenon to which ten years afterwards we are slowly becoming accustomed and which we can observe with our own eyes as it evolves and assumes different forms.

The plot involves several families who all live in the same area of a provincial town. There is the Terrenoire family, which could be regarded as a model of its kind, for Mr. and Mrs.

In a way, this is the moral of the play. «L'Année du Bac» — the sixth form year — is shown to be a period of initiation, a time when young people — through some minor and other major dramas, and not without some suffering — learn to become adults.

Lacour's next play, «Mascarin» (Fontaine Theatre, Paris, 1959) did not have such a good reception, yet it is a lusty comedy, with overtones of Molière, relating the extravagant career of a healer.

No other plays by José-André Lacour have been produced since then — except some excellent adaptations. It is to be hoped that more is to come: this top-class writer still inspires great expectations.

* * *

FÉLICIEN MARCEAU AND «L'ŒUF»

In the early days of his career, Félicien Marceau (born at Cortenberg in 1913) was known as Louis Carette. Under this name he published essays and novels (including «Le Péché de complication» — The sin of complication, 1942), worked as a journalist and broadcast.

In 1944 he moved to Paris and assumed the name by which he is known today.

He then produced some excellent novels: «Capri, petite île» (Capri, a small island), «Bergère légère» (The frivolous Bergère), «Les élans du cœur» (The impulses of the heart); essays such as the fascinating «Balzac et son monde» (Balzac and his world). He began writing for the theatre.

His first play, «Caterina» (Atelier Théâtre des Jeunes, 1954) brought its author not only success but the Pelman Prize for the Theatre in 1955. Two years later «L'Œuf» (The egg) had its first performance in the same theatre, with the director, André Barsacq. Gabriel Marcel wrote of this premiere that «27 December 1956 will be regarded as one of the salient dates in French contemporary theatre».

Why? What was there in «L'Œuf» which caused this remark from a leading critic and which kept it on the Paris billboards for more than two years?

Form, in the first place. Marceau based his play on one of his novels, «Chair et peau» (Flesh and skin). And as the central character in the novel spoke in the first person singular,

'CEUFS,

— or left this unchanged : in the play too

— character, Magis, who addresses the

— in the first person. The play consists

— monologue, illustrated from time to time

— scene from the life of Magis and those

— him : his friends, his colleagues in the

— his wife and her parents.

— Love all there is Magis himself. What an

— ng character ! This commonplace man

— from a fearful complex : he feels he is

— d outside the hostile or merely indiffe-

— rior of his fellow-creatures, the Others...

— who, as the hackneyed phrase goes,

— up fit as a fiddle» :

— Magis, I never wake up fit as a fiddle. Never.

— see the world before me, like an egg

—ooth, snug, closed. And what's inside ?

— en fit as a fiddle. All except me. Me alone.

— pt out. Different. A case. That awful chap.

— Magis guilty one...

— s tries in vain to break out of his isolation,

— in touch with the Others. He tries every-

— As Hortense his wife is having an affair

— his friend Dugommier, he demands

— ent from the latter for each of his meet-

— gs with Hortense. On the surface this seems

— inable, but in fact it is yet one more effort

— accepted, to break the shell of «The

— — — — — When I was making this effort to join them,

— to be with them still, what I could not for-

— give was that they scorned it, that they

— made it stupid, laughable. For one day I

— realised they took me for a madman. For a

— madman ! Me ! When I was crying out to

them ! When I was reaching out to them
with both hands !

In the end, Magis finds a way into «The Egg» :
by indulging in concealment, lies, giving way to
prejudice, constant pretence. Only thus is he
accepted into the social network.

At the outcome of a diabolical scheme, he kills
his wife and plants the crime on Dugommier,
who is sentenced for it. Gloating gently, Magis
remarks :

— Now it's Dugommier's turn. His turn to see
the egg before him. An egg closed on all
sides. With me hidden inside it, not showing

anything.

FROM MAGIS'S ALIBI-LIE, TO BERNARD'S PASSION-LIE

In his next plays, Marceau displayed the same moral nihilism, the same derisive laughter, yet they were all delightfully amusing. For these horror-plays all made the audiences laugh tremendously.

In «*La bonne Soupe*» (The good life), shown at the «Gymnase» in Paris in 1958, he used the same technique as in «*The Egg*», but multiplied it by two : he shows the principal character, Marie-Paule, in her youth and in middle-age, played by two different actresses who are on stage at the same time, with a running commentary by the older one on the actions of the younger version.

Marie-Paule, a shockingly venal woman, suffers all her life from the fear of having to do without. In order to gain wealth and regard, to ensure «*the good life*», she will prostitute herself in every way, indulge in every turpitude. When she attains the summit of her triumphant and revolting career, she imagines she can afford to allow herself one sincere impulse, a single disinterested gesture, but her whole edifice crumbles.

«*L'Etouffe Chrétien*» (Killer of Christians), which was first performed at the «Renaissance» in Paris in 1960, is about Nero. A man whose soul is as rent with desperation as that of Magis or Marie-Paule, but who is an emperor. The play enjoyed only moderate success. Yet some regard it as the author's masterpiece :

Robert Kinters described the hero as clowning brother of Camus's *Caigula*.

«*Les Cailloux*» (Pebbles — Atelier Théâtral, 1962) is a series of sketches about «dolce vita» set in Capri. It is a series of caricatures : « a living charnel-house, a charnel-house », commented Jean-Jacques Gautier.

Two more comedies. «*Madame Principe*» (Gymnase Theatre, Paris, 1965) : in this a simple sets up a scheme to kidnap rich wife. «*La preuve par quatre*» (Proof by four) was staged at the Michodière Theatre in 1964 : a man tries to divide his love between four women each of whom has a special charm for him.

Félicien Marceau's last play, «*Un jour j'ai rencontré la Vérité*» (One day I ran into the truth) which was staged at the «Comédie Champs-Elysées» in Paris in 1967, is about a liar. But this time he is a liar who is proud of the fact and who claims that liars see the truth, for they are the only ones to know the difference».

Whatever one may feel about Marceau's art it has to be recognized that both as a form and content, he is a outstandingly original playwright.

X TO BELGIUM

SUZANNE LILAR AND ECSTASY

to Belgium for an inventory of Belgian living in their country, who have been in the post-war years. There are many.

them. As already explained, the Belgian makes a steady consumption of native arts, which is a comforting fact.

is extremely difficult to make a selection, without risking injustice or error. Three hundred years from now, an author who may only be mentioned briefly, together with the title of play, may either be completely forgotten, may be regarded as the major figure of the temporary theatre in Belgium...

so we shall attempt to give an opinion. The names of five authors stand out, both as regards the extent of their production, their ambition at home and abroad, and the ambition reflected in their work. Let us name these «Big 5», one of whom is a woman — ladies first, the other four are listed in alphabetical order : Suzanne Lilar, Charles Bertin, Jean Gin, Georges Sion, Paul Willems.

«All the characters are tempted by God». This is what Suzanne Lilar writes in the preface to her play, «*Tous les chemins mènent au ciel*» (All roads lead to heaven). All these characters are seeking ecstasy, the road that leads to heaven ; it is an itinerary that often touches on carnal lust. Is this not blasphemous ?

The author explains :

«In this play, there is a rapprochement between religious rapture and the rapture of love. Nothing could be more in keeping with tradition. The only people who will be shocked are those who have found nothing in love but inconsequential games or a gross gratification of the appetite».

This of course is dangerous territory. Quietism and molinism lurk behind the corner, and these, as we know, are heresies that have often been condemned. But Suzanne Lilar is not one of those authors who let their characters go soft. She expects them to be strict at all times, to show a sort of asceticism even when they give in to the flesh :

«Everything here depends on the quality of the soul. For some poets, drug-induced raptures are a means of investigating the hereafter. Is rapture valid only when it is lucid ?»

In «*Le Burlador*», Don Juan tells his mistress Isabella :

— I liked your obstinate way of watching me as I took you.

To which she replies :

— Sometimes I refused to take my pleasure, so as to be lucid for yours».

A difficult path indeed : surrender to the flesh — lucidity — renunciation — and then a great leap to rapture — unless it be a refusal of rapture. We find ourselves in a thicket of conflict, struggle and contradiction.

«The fundamental theme of her theatre — Julien Gracq has written of Suzanne Lilar (1) — is the conflict between the temptation of quietist rapture, the surrender of the whole being to vertigo and consent, and the will to dominate these supreme transports through a kind of sombre thirst for lucidity and extreme consciousness».

Let us therefore take a closer look at Suzanne Lilar's three plays.

The Don Juan depicted by Suzanne Lilar in «Le Burlador» (Théâtre Saint-Georges, 1964) is, in the words of Francis Ambrié, «...a demanding character in quest of absolute, who regards it as his desire to awaken in each woman something grave and eternal; an idealistic and, I might even say, mystical Don Juan, in contrast with D'Artagnan the epicure, or rather the pig in the tale of Epicurus». In each of his conquests, it was the soul he had most, and the piercing revelation brought them. It is said of him that «he uncover vocations».

Here then we have the conquering hero of middle age. He who for the whole of humanity, thinks to find it through his love of young duchess Isabella.

«This is the plot — the author writes in the preface : Don Juan loves Isabella. He is sincere when he tells her so. Sincere also when he says : «For the first time, I think I can be faithful». What he means is that if he really follow his inclination, he would be true to her. There are few things between him and the fidelity for which he hankers as his rest and the natural bent of his love for one thing : the seducer's calling, the tyranny of the Burlador».

(1) Preface by Julien Gracq to Suzanne Lilar's book «Soixante ans de Théâtre belge» (Sixty years of Belgian theatre). Renaissance du Livre, Brussels, 1952.

«LE BURLADOR»

daughter. He is present and is present again. He sees a new world. He sees a new world and calls him back.

— Haven't you ever seen the need for me again, and the need of saving me?

— I don't realize this satanic choice.

— This accursed choice. It is seen.

ALL ROADS

Don Juan loves Isabella. Yet he cannot deflowering young Anna d'Ulloa, the Co-

Lilar's daughter. He kills his new conquest's father and is prosecuted for his crime before the law. He could easily defend himself, but Anna tells him bitterly :

— Haven't you ever felt it ? Haven't you ever felt the need for the other one, over and over again, and at the same time a loathing, a kind of saturation of the soul.

Don Juan realizes that he does indeed know what this «saturation of the soul» means, and he decides not to defend himself. In complete lucidity he chooses the fulfilment of death. By thus accepting his fate, he admits to his failure. It is Isabella who is the victor in this combat.

DO ALL ROADS LEAD TO HEAVEN ?

Suzanne Lilar's second play, «*Tous les chemins mènent au ciel*» (All roads lead to heaven), first performed at the Hébertot theatre in Paris in 1947, describes with more penetration still «the problems of terrestrial love and divine love, the link between sensuality and mysticism» (Francis Ambrière).

In the days of the «Bruges Matins», a young French knight seduces a young Flemish nun, Sister Lutgarde, who saves him from the massacre by hiding him in her cell.

Lilar

Anna tells him bitterly :

— Haven't you ever felt it ? Haven't you ever

Afterwards Lutgarde, abandoned, pregnant and ugly, scorned by all, takes refuge with a hermit in the forest. She imagines she has found the culmination of her love in the extreme abasement she is suffering. The hermit analyses her feelings :

— Since you have been here, you take pleasure in degrading yourself. Each privation is a pretext for yet further humiliation... And you are happy !

What an odd man this hermit is. Suzanne Lilar admits that originally she conceived him as a saint, but that he escaped her control and forged his own character. He is the man of the soil. He fights against the ethereal plane on which the knight and Lutgarde hope to commune. He separates them just as they are about to be reunited. He makes them agree to eternal separation.

It is difficult to decide if he is a sage or a demon as, before God, he declaims his right to dignity, to lucidity, to refuse ecstasy for himself and others :

— Where am I going ? I don't know, and it doesn't matter. In truth, Lord, allow a man to tell you : all roads lead to heaven, but heaven is not made for men.

A strange play, one that exalts through its very obscurity and contradictions.

The author's third play «*Le Roi lépreux*» (Le leper king — «Theatre du Parc», Brussels, 1951) has a plot patterned on Pirandello, in which the actors and the characters they personify — Crusaders fighting in the Holy Land — mingle in the end into a single reality.

Since then, Suzanne Lilar has written no more for the theatre, but she has published psychological essays which have received praise in many countries. Suzanne Lilar is the mother of Françoise Mallet-Joris, a brilliant novelist now living in Paris, who has also written some excellent adaptations of foreign plays.

* * *

CHARLES BERTIN AND THE DRAMA OF SOLITUDE

When the «Rideau de Bruxelles» presented Charles Bertin's first play «Les Prétendants» (The pretenders) in 1947, Honoré Lejeune, the critic, described the young author as «a clever writer, very clever, perhaps too clever». It was a compliment, combined with a feeling of concern. This concern was dispelled entirely by Bertin's second play. It showed that Bertin's cleverness should not be confused with facility, that it was simply that rare and precious thing: an author in complete command of his craft as a writer of drama.

Charles Bertin was born in Mons in 1919. He studied Law at Brussels University, and he has made a career in government service. He has

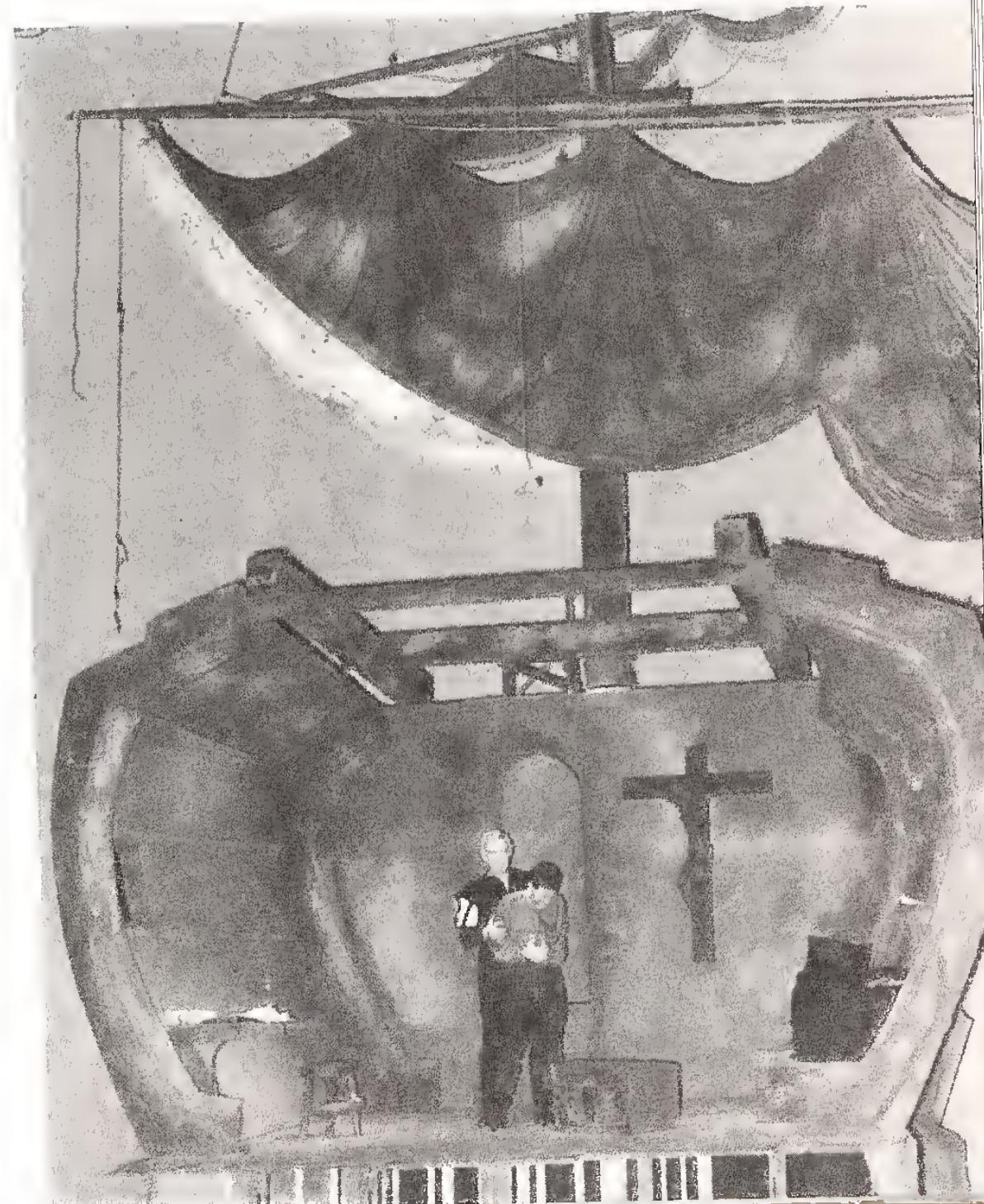
been made a member of the Belgian Royal Academy of French Language and Literature. As an author he began first of all to write poetry, which was published in 1947 in a volume entitled «Psaumes sans la grâce» (Psalms without grace).

Even now Bertin is still a poet. A poet of the theatre. A poet in his novels too. As the nephew of Charles Plisnier he has carried on a family tradition with his novels «Journal d'un crime» (Diary of a crime — 1961) and «Le Best Age» (The best years) which won the Rosse Prize in 1963.

As to Bertin's work, this is concerned entirely with different facets of one and the same drama, the drama of human solitude.

— You must understand ! I have crossed a great desert, with no other companion but my own violence.

This appeal is from Madeleine in «Les Prétendants». The man she loves loves someone else, Mathilda his wife, and in order to conquer the love that escapes her Madeleine will resort to the vilest acts. In the end she accepts defeat and goes away. Alone.



«Christopher Columbus»
by Charles Bertin

THE CURSE OF DON JUAN

CHRISTO
IN THE

— ISABELLA : Juan, when shall you stop torturing me ?
— DON JUAN : Probably never !... that is — only form of faithfulness.

«A drama of solitude in love» — that is how the author himself describes «*Don Juan*» (Théâtre du Parc, 1948). Clearly the absolutist playwrights of Belgium are obsessed with Don Juan.

Suzanne Lilar's Burlador was, in spite of everything, a chivalrous, noble creature. Bertin's Don Juan is satanic, enveloped in flames. From the very first scene, he can be seen addressing to his latest conquest, the Duchess Isabelle, declarations of love that ring true and sincere. But this is because he knows that his previous conquest, Dona Laura, is spying upon them, hidden behind a curtain. When the scene is over, he draws the curtain aside with a flourish :

— LAURA : Don Juan, one day you shall be punished !
— DON JUAN : So I have often been told, Signora. But for the time being, I am very well.

Shameless man ! First he tortures Laura, and then we see him torturing Isabella, whom he has used to attract another prey, young Anne d'Ulloa. He casts the unfortunate Isabella aside, but takes her back again when she tells him of her forthcoming marriage. He tells her that he loves her. He orders her to kill herself and to kill her future husband, and as she sets out to obey, he calls her back and bursts out laughing. It is a cat-and-mouse game :

For Anne d'Ulloa the monster seems for once to feel sincere love. He goes to say farewell to the girl, who refuses his kiss :

— I am the only one to accept that you refuse my lips... I am almost happy that you did

This is the first time he actually feels what he says. But the curse of Don Juan is still upon him. He cannot resist asking Anne for one last meeting, in her room at night, and she cannot help but agree.

The Commander appears and discovers the lovers' embrace. Don Juan kills him, and then exclaims :

— I was born to destroy. Farewell, Anne.

He goes off, alone, burdened with the curse of being Don Juan.

CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS OR THE LEADER'S SOLITUDE

In an interview which he granted when his «*Christopher Columbus*» was revived in 1966, Charles Bertin said the play was about the drama of solitude in the life of a leader. And he added :

«In his growing solitude, Columbus is the prey to three temptations that could be his undoing. Material temptation : the sailors are afraid and mutiny threatens. Spiritual temptation : the ship's chaplain, a typical man of the Middle Ages, is opposed to Columbus whom he brands as an experimenter. Sentimental temptation : Columbus's second-in-command, whom he would like to make his successor, abandons him. And when, finally, with America in sight, Columbus triumphs, he finds himself in total solitude. He has nothing left to lose».

Originally the play was written for broadcasting and, in this form, it was awarded the Italia Prize for 1953 and was translated into seven languages. It was first staged by the National Theatre, on 1 September 1958, in the large auditorium at the Brussels World's Fair.

The whole of the action takes place on board the Santa-Maria, either in the captain's cabin, or on deck, where the sailors tell of their growing anxiety.

At the end of the play, with a new continent in sight at last, Columbus becomes aware of his greatness, but also of his utter solitude :

— At this moment that God has given me, I want to be alone ! Alone as I always have been... Facing Columbus the deprived, Columbus the flouted, Columbus the battered, Columbus the madman, there is now Columbus the man of God !

THE JESTER KING : A GRANDSON OF CALIGULA

Mention should also be made of other, earlier works by Charles Bertin.

«*Colombe et le jeune homme*» (Colombe and the young man), first performed at the «Théâtre du Parc» in Brussels in 1949, is light entertainment in the manner of Anouilh's «rose-coloured plays».

On the other hand «*Les Folies Bergère*» (Rideau de Bruxelles, 1950) is, despite its misleading title, a highly dramatic play. It is the history of the Bergère family which is ravaged by the philandering of the head of the family, a sort of bourgeois Don Juan.

In 1963 the «Rideau de Bruxelles» presented a freely adapted version of «*L'Oiseau Vert*» (The Green bird) by Carlo Gozzi. In a light-hearted vein that was clearly shared by the actors, Charles Bertin succeeded here in recreating the magic and colour of the Commedia

dell'Arte. It was again at the «Rideau de Bruxelles» that Bertin's latest play, «Le Roi Bonheur» (The jester king) was first performed in 1966.

This is a farce about the young king of an imaginary country. Charles Bertin describes the young monarch's philosophy as follows:

«Once he realizes that there is a basic absurdity in the order of things and once he has learned to his cost how right his ancestor Caligula was to assert that the only certain truth is that men die and are not happy, King John decides that his only choice is between two attitudes which, for want of happiness, are alone capable of rendering the human condition bearable : murder and derision».

Whereas Caligula opted for murder, young King John opts for derision. He makes fun of his officials and foils inept conspiracies. The whole kingdom turns into a kind of circus in which clowns and jesters perform one by one, where principles and conventions are held up to ridicule.

This farce with harsh undertones — once again it is based on the drama of the leader and his solitude — has a happy ending. King John is saved by the love of a tender-hearted young girl from the local inn.

JEAN MOGIN OR THE REFUSAL TO COMPROMISE

Jean Mogin, the son of the poet Norge, was born in Brussels in 1921, in the house that later witnessed the birth of the «Journal des Poètes».

He married the poetess Lucienne Desnoes and jointly they were awarded the Camille Engelmann Prize for Poetry in 1965. He himself has published volumes of poetry entitled «La Vigne amère» (The bitter vine), «Les Vigiles» (Vigils) and «Les Pâtures du Silence» (Pastures of silence).

This poet who has by a happy concourse of circumstances been appointed head of spoken broadcasts at the Belgian Radio and Television (R.T.B.) — working hard despite his seeming unconcern — decided one day to write for the theatre.

His first try turned out to be a masterpiece. It was «A chacun selon sa faim» (To each according to his need) which the Raymond Hermantier Company presented at the «Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier» in Paris on 17 February 1950. After the premiere, Francis Ambrière wrote in «Opéra» :

«I am happy to salute the debut of Mr. Jean Mogin, about whom I know nothing except that he is under thirty and that in his very first play he attains a style and discipline such as only great playwrights possess».

What is this play that is based on history? What is this play that is based on history?

— success both with the critics and with the public. It is based on history.

— young nun Maria is based on history.

— convent in the 18th century is based on history.

— against the Church is based on history.

— the absolute is based on history.

— girls in her convent is based on history.

— foolish and stupid is based on history.

— sinner. She drives is based on history.

— other priests is based on history.

— she herself, is based on history.

— hears comes is based on history.

— with a mad is based on history.

— I love God. What is based on history.

— doctrines? Do is based on history.

— book, a book is based on history.

— enough... God is based on history.

— need. I am not is based on history.

— I love God. What is based on history.

— doctrines? Do is based on history.

— book, a book is based on history.

— enough... God is based on history.

— need. I am not is based on history.

— I love God. What is based on history.

— doctrines? Do is based on history.

— book, a book is based on history.

— enough... God is based on history.

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— doctrines? Do is based on history.

— book, a book is based on history.

— enough... God is based on history.

— need. I am not is based on history.

What is this play that proved such an outstanding success both with the Paris audiences and with the critics? The most austere tale imaginable.

is based on historic fact. In the 19th century, young nun Maria de Melo, the superior of a convent in the Portuguese countryside, rebels against the Church. Why? Because she thirsts for the absolute. Because she does not want the girls in her charge to be in contact with the foolish and unworthy priest who is their smasher. She drives him out and refuses to let any other priest into the convent. Henceforth is she herself, in close communion with God, who hears confession and celebrates mass, filled with a mad love for God.

— I love God. What do I want with doctors and doctrines? Do you want me to lead my flock, a book in my hand? The Heart is enough... God is to each according to his need. I am his unreservedly.

That is what this implacable spirit tells the delegate whom the bishop has despatched to lead her back to the path of obedience. Obey she will not. She is afire with love, with rebellion. The convent is surrounded by soldiers, and also by a crowd of spiteful villagers. The nuns flee, but Maria stays on. The convent is set on fire. When at last she is taken from the flames, she is crushed and dying.

In the throes of death, she finds peace at last:

— I broke away from your Roman rules and precepts, but do not bear malice with me. All is well again... I led you on to the limits of temptation, just as you urged me on.

And at the same time I was following my God, who is your God too. He was offered to me on the condition that I accept you as my executioners, that you accept me as your victim.

And so she dies. The people who killed her are already veering round and beginning to regard her as a saint.

THE COTTON BARRICADE

After the triumph it enjoyed in Paris, «*A charbon selon sa faim*» was performed all over the world, in Canada, Madagascar, Tunis and Helsinki.

Mogin's second play «*Le Rempart de coton*» (The cotton barricade), which was staged by the Hermantier Company in 1952, was not as well received by the Paris critics. Yet this is highly unfair, as will be appreciated by those who read this fine play. This too is the story of an uncompromising spirit. The action takes place at the end of the War of Secession. A young southern planter, André Redortiers, refuses to concede defeat. He barricades himself in his house, behind bales of cotton, and decides to hold out to the end.

None of his nearest and dearest succeed in changing his mind: his wife Isabelle, and a cousin Eleanor, whom he used to love deeply. He refuses these temptations of happiness, for it is another type of happiness that he demands :

— I want to meet death suddenly, like a gulp of icy water that takes your breath away and floods you with a dreadful and final happiness.

Then there is the temptation of politics. The dialogue between André Redortiers and Governor Molines, who begs him to capitulate in order to avoid needless suffering (the peren-

nial pretext!) is worthy of the confrontation between Creon and Antigone. André Redortiers will not give in, and he killed in the collapse of his cotton barricade.

THE GIRL BY THE FOUNTAIN

With his third play, Jean Mogin again had an outstanding success. Called «*La Fille à la fontaine*» (The girl by the fountain) it was staged with great success by the Hermantier Company at the Nîmes Festival in 1955 and shown the following year by the Belgian National Theatre. It was based on an actual happening : «I share the vice of most hall-porters : I like to know what is happening to people... That is why I was greatly affected by a three-line item which, like you, I read in the papers last year: a girl had spent forty-eight hours at the door of her fiance, who refused to see her. The villagers, who had at first mocked her, later turned against her tormentor».

This is what Chiari, the obstinate girl, says on the second day of her vigil by the fountain in front of her faithless fiance's house, in response to the villagers' pleas that she should go back to her mother :

— I refuse, I refuse with joy ; what happiness there is in the word, what deliverance ! —

refuse all reason, all caution. Yes I refuse, to refuse for evermore to give myself to you, to your little helpings of tenderness, and I dedicate myself to voracious love, even if it destroys me... Come, let us say farewell. I am leaving, I am breaking with you ; but I do so without rancour. It has to be, and you know that there is nothing left for us to do together...

Lilian, a girl consumed by passion, ready to take flight, to break with everything that is not her love, is clearly the sister of Maria de Mello 2nd of André Redortiers.

A QUEEN FOR NINE DAYS

In 1963 the «Rideau de Bruxelles» presented «*La Reine de neuf jours*» (A queen for nine days) which related the story of the sixteen-year old queen, Jane Grey, who was supplanted by her cousin Mary Tudor and beheaded after reigning over England for little more than a week. The story of Jane's love for her young husband is the story of a great love. She imagines that she could make him the magnificent gift of a crown, and lives through moments of sheer enchantment. But suddenly the fairy tale turns to drama. The young queen, forced to become a heroine, assumes a new dimension and goes to her death with dignity.

Jean Mogin has proved that he can also write in lighter vein. «*Archanges Gabriel*» (Archangels Gabriel), first performed at the Gymnase theatre in Liege in 1966, is high farce. Relating the many efforts needed to persuade a prince to share his young bride's bed and thus ensure the continuity of the royal line, it raised the vigorous laughter it was intended to provoke.

Lastly, «*Le Mystère de la Nativité, de la Passion et de la Résurrection de Notre Seigneur*» (Mystery of the Nativity, Passion and Resurrection of Our Lord), performed at the National Theatre in 1966, is a collation of medieval texts from France and Wallonia. In a setting representing a cathedral in the course of construction, this illustrated the faith of those who performed the mysteries and miracles of old. Here again, Jean Mogin proved that he was both a playwright and a poet.

* * *

GEORGES SION OR THE INSTINCT FOR HAPPINESS

FROM THE LADY OF EPHESUS TO THE GRAND DUKE OF THE WEST

In «Le Jeu de Marie de Nivelles» (Pageant of Mary of Nivelles) an ambitious open-air performance staged to commemorate the 750th anniversary of Marie d'Oignies, a saint from Nivelles, Georges Sion had his main character say the following prayer :

— And be thanked, oh Lord, even if the word happiness is a difficult one».

The whole of Sion's work seems to be a meditation on happiness. Happiness of the flesh, terrestrial happiness in the first place ; and a more demanding happiness next.

A few words first about this fortunate writer, who has known nothing but success since his first play, «La Matrone d'Ephèse» (The matron of Ephesus), was selected for the first performance of the newly formed «Rideau de Bruxelles» in 1943.

Georges Sion was born at Binche in 1913. After graduating in Law at the University of Louvain, he soon turned from the law to literature. Director of the «Revue Générale Belge», a respected critic, professor of dramatic writing, and a talented lecturer, he is also a member of the Belgian Royal Academy of French Language and Literature. He has travelled extensively and has written about his travels in America and the Congo. He has written some amusing treatises on «Le Théâtre français d'entre-deux-guerres» (The French theatre between the two wars) and «La Conversation française» (French conversation).

Let us start with the «Matrone d'Ephèse». According to the tale told by Petronius, a disconsolate widow refuses to leave her husband's grave. Yet she ends up finding consolation in the arms of a sturdy soldier. And, in order to save her lover's life, she even consents to have her husband's body hung from the gallows, instead of the prisoner whom the soldier, with other things on his mind, has guarded so poorly. Love always entails some sacrifice...

Although this can be regarded as light entertainment, Romain Sainvic commented as follows :

«This fresh comedy, bearing the scent of Greece, was like a breath of fresh air wafting through those endless wartime winters».

The matron is a lady whose happiness is of the flesh. Quite different is the lofty happiness sought by the imperious hero of «Charles le Teméraire» (Charles the Bold - «Rideau de Bruxelles», March 1944). Towards the end of the play, as the Grand Duke of the West prepares to leave on his last campaign, we hear him in conversation with his second wife Margaret of York, and with his daughter Marie of Burgundy. Recalling one of her grandmother's remarks, Marie observes in somewhat melancholy fashion :

— Does a prince's life have to be so constrained? I remember something the lady Isabelle said a few months before her death

princes should practise finding happiness in their duty.

Charles defines this duty in a scene one is tempted to describe as «Shakespearean» — if there is a similar one in *Henry IV* — in which he addresses his dying father, Philip the Bold. This is the promise he makes :

— I shall keep everything you leave me, our land of Flanders and the tapestry cities, Brabant that feeds us, Namur and Luxembourg with their forests, Liege which is as handsome as Rome on the river Meuse, the Duchy of Burgundy whose wines you love, Dijon where we were born. I owe you gratitude for assembling our possessions, rendering justice which is the principal virtue. And if I make war, because I am forced to, it shall be to give our lands the assurance they need.

Charles stands by his promise. We shall see him resisting Louis XI, «the universal spider». We shall also see this good father and loving husband breaking the bonds of love and tenderness, to set off on new adventures. No matter how exhausted, he will always set off again. Until he suffers his last betrayal, his ultimate defeat. Then he exclaims :

— Let them go who have no more courage or faith. I shall attack Nancy with only ten men if they are the only ones left. Then I should die with at least ten brave men at my side. I should fight even if I were alone. You may think this is madness. Perhaps the world is becoming a realm of rogues and

traitors. Perhaps it is old-fashioned to believe in such things as honour and chivalry. If so, perish the world, or let me perish ! I shall be the last of the knights.

So he throws himself into the fray and is killed.

ALL HAPPINESS ENTAILS SACRIFICE

In 1945, Georges Sion celebrated the liberation of his country, the land he loves so much : «...the land of Belgium, a lighter moored in the North, weighty as an island and laden with opulence» (Charles the Bold), by presenting a play specially written for the occasion «*L'Arbre de la Liberté*» (The tree of liberty - Théâtre du Parc) in collaboration with Henri Soumagne (1). Next, Sion wrote a delightful fantasy in the manner of Giraudoux, «*Cher Gonzague*» (Dear

(1) Apart from «*L'Arbre de la Liberté*» and an adaptation of Goethe's «*Egmont*» (Palais des Beaux-Arts, Brussels, 1945), Henry Soumagne (1891-1951) produced most of his work between the two wars. Soumagne was a leading playwright of his generation, comparable to Crommelynck and Ghelderode, thanks to plays like «*Bas-Noyard*» (Théâtre du Marais, 1924), «*L'Autre Messie*» (The other Messiah) and «*Madame Maïrie*» (Théâtre de l'Œuvre, Paris, 1923 and 1928).



Gonzague) with
de Bruxelles - in
with happiness
for at its prop-
are two young
that is haunted
But before I
with the man
zague the frie-
in the herma-
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"Princesse"
National Tra-
"La Princess"
by Carlo Go-
-er unsuc-
to be sim-
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THE TRAVELLER OF FORCELoup

Gonzague) which was staged by the «Rideau de Bruxelles» in 1947. This again is concerned with happiness, happiness that has to be paid for at its proper price. Françoise and Colette are two young women living in an old castle that is haunted by the lovable ghost Gonzague. But before the young ladies find happiness with the men of their choice, and before Gonzague the friendly ectoplasm can bill and coo in the hereafter with a ghostly lady named Catherine, the castle has to be given away, not sold. The achievement of happiness of any kind always entails some sort of sacrifice.

«*Princesse de Chine*» (Princess from China, National Theatre, 1962) takes up the theme of «*La Princesse Turandot*» (Princess Turandot) by Carlo Gozzi. The cruel princess who has all her unsuccessful suitors killed, is shown here to be simply a timid young woman who dis- guises her modesty as pride, even though she is hankering for a great love. How well Sion tells this enchanting story.

This is probably Georges Sion's principal play, the one into which he has poured the most of himself : «*Le Voyageur de ForceLoup*» (The traveller of Forceloup - Rideau de Bruxelles, 1951).

The action is set in an isolated farm in the Ardennes forest called «Forceloup». The time is the Middle Ages, when pilgrims travelled along the roads of christendom, assured always of finding a welcome, friendship and respect. Fabre, the master of Forceloup, lived in the house with his wife Bella, who was as beautiful as her name. One day this strong and upright man was struck down by a malady that was the most dreadful of all in those days of burning faith : he began to doubt.

«He was afraid of losing his faith. This is a fear that can come to men and prevent them living in peace. He had no education, he saw no one at Forceloup. He wanted to ask questions. He felt himself to be one of the damned because he doubted».

So Fabre took to the road to search for ways of regaining his faith.

Some time later a Traveller comes to Force- loup, a type of pilgrim, and he is given accom- modation. This deeply religious man proves to possess a strange power : through prayer he can transfer to himself the ills that other men suffer from.

Doucet, who is engaged to Claire, Bella's young cousin, has a serious leg injury. This

heals with miraculous suddenness, but now it is the Traveller whose leg has a deep gash. Tired of waiting for her husband, Bella has taken as her lover a former soldier called Guillaume. There is a bond of savage passion between them. The Traveller transfers Guillaume's sin to himself. Purified, the soldier leaves Bella. But now it is the Traveller who is devoured by desire for the young woman, a desire which he resists as best he can.

After a long absence Fabre, Bella's husband, returns home. He knows all about Bella's passion for Guillaume, but the latter has gone forever. Fabre understands and forgives. Bella finds peace again in her husband's arms.

Alas, Fabre himself has not yet found peace. He has travelled in vain, sought the counsel of priests and scholars. Doubt is still firmly lodged in the recesses of his soul, devouring him like some wild animal.

There is only one hope left to him. He learns that it was the Traveller who healed Doucet's injury and who cured Guillaume of his guilty love. He asks to be cured too.

At first the Traveller is appalled at the thought of this further trial, the most dreadful of all. But once again, his love for his fellow-man leads him to accept this burden.

He addresses a prayer to God, the God he will soon be doubting and probably abjure :

— Lord, this may be my last prayer to You as a friend for a long time. I may come to suspect You, to close my eyes to your Light. I do not know the country in which I shall be travelling if You so desire. I only know

its frightful aridity because one day I saw a man returning from the land of thirst. I offer up to You my sorrow and the indifference I shall display towards you.

He goes away. We shall not see him suffering from the thirst and aridity he has accepted. As to Fabre, we only know that he has been cured of his tormenting doubt from this line, the last in the play, the line he speaks after the Traveller's departure : «I am beginning to pray for him».

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PAMELA'S TRUNK

— MICHAEL : Pamela, I love you !

— PAMELA : At last ! To think that women usually hear these words after a mere walk round the garden !

the authors discussed in the preceding chapters were men in search of the absolute, it outside any specific religious creed. Georges Sion on the other hand is a deeply Christian writer, akin to Claudel, Bernanos, Graham Greene or Ugo Betti. This he proved again with an act of faith, «*Le Jeu de Marie de Nivelles*» (1963), already described above.

Having sacrificed everything to the divine love that consumes her, young Marie d'Oignies finds fulfilment at last as she is dying. St. John appears to her and says :

— It is time for you to find at last the Happiness you divined, your turn has come to hear the Heart of God beating with eternal love. Come, Mary, come.

But Sion, though deeply religious, can also be a highly entertaining writer. «*La Malte de Pamela*» (Pamela's trunk, *Rideau de Bruxelles*, 1955), set in scenery reminiscent of the great English writers of the 18th century, Fielding or Smollet, relates the tribulations of a young woman who tours the world in search of the last letter which her late husband, a dreaded privateer, had written to her. Pamela travels to the ends of the earth to find a happiness that was actually within hand's reach. Only when she is back home from her travels does she realize that she is beloved by her faithful travelling companion, young Michael. At last he is bold enough to declare his love :

This is Sion's moral : love can be found only after a long voyage : you cannot simply find it at the bottom of the garden. Before leaving this writer, let us quote something he said about the role of the theatre more than thirteen years ago, and which is still valid today :

«In dark ages, art is invaluable because of the form which it gives the darkness. Today, the theatre is in a state of grace because our century is in a state of sin. The century has endowed the theatre with a great and bitter favour. It has entrusted the theatre with all its secrets, it looks to the theatre to elucidate and interpret them. Later on it will be clear that, between 1930 and 1955, the theatre was the principal stadium, the most frequented confessional, the most penetrating voice».

Change 1955 tot 1969, and this observation still applies.

* * *

PAUL WILLEMS AND THE BEAUTY OF GARDENS

In attempting to describe the work of Paul Willems, we should first quote the conclusion of his novel «La Chronique du Cygne» (The swan's chronicle):

Then came the day when, as already explained, Claude Etienne read «Tout est réel ici» and commissioned the author to write a play. The result was «Le bon Vin de M. Nuche» (The good wine of Mr. Nuche - «Rideau de Bruxelles», 1949).

“...it was on my bended knees that I watched and listened to the beauty of gardens”.

This is the ethic of Paul Willems, a poet fascinated with the bewitching effect of the familiar. He himself was born in a garden, on 4 April 1912, in the castle of Missembourg, at Edegem near Antwerp, which is still inhabited by his

Young Willems, the brother of «Madame Orpha» and «La Comtesse des Dagues», first studied Law at Brussels University but then went to work at the Palais des Beaux-Arts and stayed there : today he is its Director-General, as well as being president of the «Jeunesses Musicales» (Musical Youth) and Director of the «Association pour la Diffusion Artistique et Culturelle» (Association for Artistic and Cultural Diffusion).

He began by publishing short stories and novels which showed already what the characters in his play would be like: he brings the most every-day objects into contact with the stars, describes people and feelings such as one meets every day, but moving in the realm of the unusual and the marvellous, somewhere over the rainbow. The titles of these books are «Tout est réel ici» (Everything is real here, 1941), «L'Herbe qui tremble» (Tremulous grass,

LE BON VIN DE M. NUCHE

As the curtain rises, the first line of Paul Willem's dialogue for the theatre runs as follows:

— THE ASTRONOMER : (He is wearing morning coat and looks like one of the scientists in children's story-books). — From here, from this square in the upper part of the city, I can see as complete a collection of stars as can be seen anywhere in the world. They look like thousands of

shiny shells, thrown up on a beach of black sand by a wave more powerful than the Atlantic itself. On the days when God takes his bath in the ocean of the night, shooting stars rush everywhere like phosphorescent fishes in flight. Amid these shells and fishes, my telescope detects the planets. They are lovely mermaids with rings on their fingers, their hair dotted with lights called satellites.

When the sky is cloudy I aim my telescope

at the
complex
anywhere
I see a
stars..

at the town and I contemplate the most complete collection of windows to be seen anywhere in the world. Some of the women I see at these windows are as lovely as the stars...

One of the houses in the astronomer's telescope is that of Mr. and Mrs. Nuche, a dreadfully bourgeois couple, who beat Martin their valet and who are turning their daughter Isabelle into a stupid fool.

— ISABELLE :

I read the weeklies, I listen to the radio,

I should like to know about men

But I'm afraid when they touch me

I don't know what I want

My name is Isabelle, Isabelle Nuche

At school my friends alle call ma lsacruche

(stupid Isabel).

All goes well until the day poor Martin, quite desperate, drinks from a bottle in Mr. Nuche's cupboard which is marked «POISON». But the label was misleading. Filled with a bottle of excellent wine Martin falls into the company of two tramps who teach him what to say to Isabelle, how to conquer her love :

— Leave your shoes at the door
And take off your white dress.

Come with me

Between the crisp fresh sheets.

Martin says all this and many other sweet words, and he wins through. There is a happy ending, with the lovers united, and the Astronomer in charge :

— Isabelle and Martin, hold each other's hand ; listen to me, and seek no more, you have found paradise.

Like most first plays, «Le bon vin» had its faults. But by the time Willems wrote his second play, these failings had disappeared. He gave the theatre a new style. He bewitched his audiences in an entirely novel manner, elusive as the mists on the Scheldt ; familiar as a chair, a table, or a daisy ; and at the same time as fanciful as a celebration in some secret garden, a celebration reserved for fairies, talking birds, little children, wise and kind old men, young girls and poets.

This celebration consists so far of ten turns... or rather, ten plays. It would be difficult to choose between ten such kaleidoscopic marvels. Should one prefer «Lamentable Julie» (Poor Julie - Rideau, 1949) relating the third conquest of the libidinous, forever drowsy and bigamous Erneston, to «Air barbare et tendre» (Barbarous but tender air - Rideau 1952), which tells of the strange adventure of the fisherman Pino, his shrewish wife Pinoche, their daughter Rose Pino, and of the duplicated fish Profond, the horse Lazarus, Baron Ventre Saint-Fion and other equally important noblemen ?

Let me tell you the plot of «Peau d'Ours» (Bearskin - National Theatre 1951). Once upon a time there was a soldier who, for seven years, refused to take off his bearskin, which covered him from head to foot, in order to become rich and marry Minou, the daughter of Mr. Boule. He became so dirty and matted that the birds used to nest in his beard. But his patience was rewarded and he married

Minou. The characters however also include two teasing birds, Mr. and Mrs. Pic, the Sun which is also the Moon, the butcher Pacotin, Jules who became mute because of a caramel, Leon, the happy imbecile who marries Minou's sister, Mariette, etc... etc. !

This is what the Sun (which is also the Moon) says when the lovers are united :

— There they are garbed in their love as a tree is garbed in its leaves. Trees, stop rustling ; leaves, stop moving light, stop singing... Listen, listen to the warm silence that comes to our soul when we can watch a pageant of simple things...

FROM EEL BEACH TO THE DOG OFF

The plays of Paul Willems are armfuls of images which he casts before our astonished eyes. You cannot take everything in. There is too much of it: too much bright or tender light, too much colour, not to mention the music. Let us try to list, haphazardly, some of the gems from this treasury.

«*La plage aux Anguilles*» (Eel Beach - «Rideau», 1959) is set in the upturned carcass of an old boat, on a bend of the river Scheldt, where wrecks come to rest; it is inhabited by Phœbus, an old sailor; there is also the Good God, an old man who takes refuge in sleep at the slightest sign of trouble; their friend young Laurent, who only dreams of travel :

— PHEBUS : Every time a ship goes by, there are waves.

LAURENT : I have the feeling they whisper : come... come... come...

There are gangsters too : the Bigamist, Xury, Leon Veste ; and a dead body washed up on the mud...

«*Il pleut dans ma maison*» (It's raining in my house - Rideau, 1962) is about the Grand'Rôsière estate, which stands by a pond. In order to save it, it is turned into a hotel. As you arrive, you receive a chestnut leaf, with the message :

“Let us dream, it is raining, our destiny is haltered, dreams and reflections are our only freedom».

Then there is the person who died long ago, Jay ; the sonorous course ; and midnight carp soup.

«Le Marché des jawn - Rideau. invented by rich Mr. with Salad !) for the True Union with the True Pocket that sells cigarettes, feathers,

bubbles and bubbles, Jacky, the conman all over the world nor of the Toba rich Miss Clerte bicycle tour ; the for disconsolate dreadful disease the love between and the too dear of Baron Dupont Salat' is ruined cheques that

«*Off et la Jupe*»

Theatre, 1955
the prayer of

— Saint Medard

Pray for
Let the rain stop
Let no one go
So that
Let them go
Let me go
So that
Let me go

there is the phantom of the young man
died long ago, on the eve of his wedding
the sonorous fountain and lovers of
arse ; and midday partridge soup as well as
night carp soup...

« Le Marché des petites heures » (Market at
Evn - Rideau, 1966) : a phony slum area
vented by rich M. Salat' (not to be confused
with Salad !) for the benefit of those travelling
with the True Universe Agency ; the flea mar-
ket that sells polished pebbles, smokeless ciga-
rettes, feathers, foolish songs, kites, soap
bubbles and other similar marvels ; Tobago
Jacky, the conjurer, who is wanted by police
all over the world because he killed the Gover-
nor of the Tobago Isles ; the affair between
rich Miss Clette and that awful Miracelli ; a
bicycle tour ; the love of tender Don Vasouille
for disconsolate Annie ; « apple vapours », a
dreadful disease that only afflicts rich people ;
the love between the sentimental Exception
and the too distinguished Mr. Fetch ; the love
of Baron Dupont and Ceremonie Duvent ; M.
Salat' is ruined and sells, at high cost, real
cheques that bounce ; etc... etc... etc...
« Off et la lune » (Off and the moon - National
Theatre, 1955) : all we need do here is quote
the prayer of the dog Off :

— Saint Medor and saint Azor,
Pray for me.
Let the moon be overcast.
Let no one die,
So that I need not howl.
Let them neither sell nor beat me.
Let me have sides less lean,
So that I need not howl.
Let me not be run over

(Very softly)

And let me learn to speak
(Silence, then in a falsely detached manner)
And then, if you want to please me, give
my master the idea that he should buy me a
little tartan coat. It's very smart.

WARNA OR THE WEIGHT OF THE SNOW

Then there is « Warna ou Je Poids de la neige »
(Warna or the weight of the snow - Rideau,
1963) the only drama that Paul Willems has
written.

As the author himself explains :

« ...I heard an echo of the past when I learned
that in certain villages in Flanders there is a
street called « black snow street » to commemo-
rate some ancient famine. When ? A long
time ago. First there had been the wars be-
tween the Imperial troops and the French, and
these were followed by serious risings. Then
there was a harsh winter. People were so
hungry that they could not bear the sight of
the snow. They were so dazed that they
imagined the land to be covered by some
gigantic black pall woven by the black flakes.
It seems that in those days packs of famished
dogs came to attack the villages, and that
some areas became entirely depopulated.
Amid this anarchy, I visualise a castle protect-

ed by its ponds, with reserves of food sufficient to last for several years. Here lives Warna, an old woman given over entirely to a dream: her love for the knight Ernevelde.

She met Ernevelde twenty-five years before. Since then, everything has changed. Ernevelde has aged, and has become fat, gross and self-important. He has lost everything that he had in his youth. The country lies in ruin, and there is nothing left of the past, of Wanda's youth. Still she maintains that life is as she wants it to be.

Wanda's passion represents a fight against reality, similar to the combat which a child on a sandcastle wages against the rising tide.

Night after night, Warna awaits her lover, made up and dressed in her finest clothes.

Ernevelde returns, but only to tell her that she is old and ugly and that he can stand her no more. So the countless has him murdered, which is the only way for her to keep the illusion on which her life depends.

The most recent proof of the esteem in which European drama circles hold this Belgian playwright, lay in the award of the Marzotto Prize for 1966. This important prize is open to a jury consisting of theatrical producers and directors from countries all over Europe. In 1966 it went to Paul Willems for «*La Ville à Voile*» (The city in full sail).

What is «*La Ville à Voile*»? After eight plays about the enchantment of youth, this, like Warna, is a meditation on the disenchantment of middle age. Paul Willems explains this word as follows:

«The idea came to me in Antwerp, one day when there was a storm. The clouds rolled across the harbour. The city looked to me like some gigantic boat, with the clouds for sails. It is the story of a poor child that has to sleep out. At the age of fifteen he leaves town determined to make his fortune and then to return to buy the objects he covets in a second-hand shop. Thirty years later, he returns, a

THE CITY IN FULL SAIL

Paris has not yet discovered Paul Willems — but then it took the capital of French literature a long time to discover Ghelderode. Elsewhere however, especially in Germany and Austria, he is regarded as one of the most important contemporary playwrights. Several of his plays were first performed in German, Vienna, Berlin or Cologne, before being shown in their original language, or otherwise they were premiered simultaneously.

OTHER NAME

rich man. He thought that there was a keeper has recovered it used to be. But he has life. The old man does not satisfy him. He wants to be. This means that he comes victory. His play was first produced in 1966 at the Theatre in 1966

We have decided to believe many other merit close so short.

Most Belgian theatre. Most production avant-garde brave. To and José Ruyters. Below. New edition. "Graf", to André P. Sanyo et Evert

such man. He buys the whole shop. Sensing that there was money to be made, the shopkeeper has reconstituted the shop window as used to be. But time has gone by. And so has life. The objects he coveted no longer satisfy him. He is a disappointed man.

This means defeat, but out of this defeat comes victory for youth and its dreams. The play was first performed by the National Theatre in 1968.

OTHER NAMES, OTHER TITLES...

We have discussed a number of writers whom we believe to be significant. But there are many others too, and several of them would merit closer examination, if space were not so short.

Most Belgian authors like writing for the theatre. Most of their plays find their way into production, either by a regular theatre, an avant-garde company or by groups such as the brave «Théâtre d'Essai» of Roger Avermaete and José Nicaise, whose aim it is to stage hitherto unperformed Belgian plays.

Below, in the first place, are the names of a few actor-writers : Raymond Gerôme : «Obéron», 1949 ; «Mauve et le Jitterbug», 1951 ; André F. Daufel : «Le Satyre du XVIII^e siècle in Paris) 1951 ; «La Dent Satyr of the XVIII^e siècle in Paris) 1952 ; «Bâti sur le

sable» (Built on the sand) 1952 ; Jacques Philippet : «Marie du rêve» (Mary of dreams) 1951 ; Frédéric Latin : «Le Jabberwock» (1955) ; Michel Fasbender : «Bienvénue, Mister John !» (Welcome Mr. John !) 1956 ; Marcelle Dambremont : «Les Feux de la rampe» (Footlights) ; Josè Brouwers : «Poisson volé» (Leapfrog) 1964.

One name that should not be forgotten is that of André Frère, who is the author and sole interpreter of the «Comédies à une voix» (Comedies for a single voice).

Journalists and critics have also been tempted to write for the stage : Jean Blondel : «Nous n'avons plus de souvenirs» (We have no more memories) 1946 ; Guy Van Zandycke : «Ardeurs du sang» (Ardour of the blood) 1952, «Trépas à discréption» (Death unlimited) 1956 ; Jean Welle : «Castor et Pollux» in collaboration with François Mennes, 1958 ; «La montre en or» (The gold watch) 1956 and «Fêttons Grand-Mère» (Let's fête Granny) 1959 in collaboration with Philippe Toussaint ; «Ulysse de rien» (Ulysses of nothing at all) 1954 ; Jean Sigrid : «Les beaux Gestes» (Handsome gestures) 1950 ; «L'Homme à la branche» (The man with the branch) 1951 ; «Piété pour Violette» (Pity for Violet) 1953, etc ; Jean Francis : «Willem van Saeftinge», «Dallas», «22 November 1963», 1966, etc.

Poets too : Jean de Cound : «Le Ballet du pauvre soldat» (The ballet of the poor soldier) 1957 ; and Liliane Wouters : «Oscarine ou les Tournesols» (Oscarina or the sunflowers) 1966. Other writers still : Marcel Falagne : «Jeanne aux fers» (Saint Joan in irons) 1964 ; Wim Gérard : «Le commandant d'El Alamo» (The Comander of El Alamo) 1964 ; René Rongé : «La

folie du logis (Imagination) 1953; Charles

Cordier: «Le Prince Ali» (Prince Ali) 1962;

Maurice Mousenne: «La Vieille à la lampe»

(The old woman with the lamp) 1961; Yvan

Dailly: «J'ai bien l'honneur» (The honour is

mine) 1962; Françoise Catteau: «Vive la petite

Catherine» (Long live young Catherine) 1965;

Philippe Darel: «Le Wurflizer» 1964; Jean

Louvet: «L'An Un» (The Year one) 1964; Alain

Germoz: «Les Résidus» (The residue) etc... etc.

There has also been a fascinating dramatic adaptation by Lucien Binot of «Chalet 1», the work of the novelist André Baillon (L'Etude 1968).

Works by several of these writers — Jean François, Charles Cordier, Alain Germoz, Jean Louvet — have been performed in other countries too.

In 1955, Fauquez became the regular playwright of José Géal's «Théâtre de l'Entance» (Children's Theatre). In addition to revivals of the previous plays, they performed «Ambroisie l'heure» (Ambrosio kills the time) 1955 «Le Roman de Renart» (Tale of Reynard the Fox) 1958; «La Bombe de Zapato» (Zapato's bomb) 1964.

His «Don Quichotte de la Manche» (Don Quixote of La Mancha) has so far been published only in German (Eastern Germany) and English (U.S.A.).

Arthur Fauquez has the rare gift of enthral-

SPECIALIZED WRITERS

Lastly, the names of some authors who are making a novel contribution to the theatre.

There is, for instance, the highly specialized field of plays for children. Arthur Fauquez (born in Antwerp in 1912) has won some outstanding successes in this difficult genre. His works are not only appreciated by young Belgians, but have been translated into many other languages and have been performed in France, in Germany, in England, in the United States, Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia, etc. Arthur Fauquez first began writing for the theatre during the war, for the puppets of the «Comédiens Belges». In 1946 he wrote his first play for flesh-and-blood actors, a version of «Robinson Crusoe» that was first staged by the Little Theatre of the «Palais des Beaux-Arts» in Brussels. During the same year this same company staged «Les pommes d'or» (Golden apples).

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style.
Maurice Lam's
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municipality.

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Killarney

audiences between the ages of 6 and 12 with plays which contain not a trace of infantilism, are built around captivating and well constructed plots, and are presented in pure but lively style.

Maurice Lambilliotte, who is the director of the monthly «Synthèses», has written two socially significant plays, «*Marie du Peuple*» (Mary of the people), which was produced at the Mons Theatre in 1949, and «*Le Sens du Divin*» (A sense of the divine), which is linked to a musical score by René Defossez (Monnaie Theatre, 1949). But above all he will be remembered for the magnificent «*Jeu de Saint-Josse*» (Pageant of Saint-Josse) which was performed in the open, in the square in front of the church of Saint-Josse-ten-Noode, to commemorate the millennium of this Brussels municipality.

The works of Edmond Kinds are extremely varied, and he has successfully tackled many different types of play. «*Le Valet des Songes*» (Valet of dreams) is the story of man who can be hired to play a part in his clients' dreams (Paris, Théâtre de l'Humour, 1953); «*Deux verres de Barbera*» (Two glasses of Barbera) relates how an ex-serviceman, who was badly injured at Tobruk, sets off in search of the gunner who maimed him (Paris, Théâtre de Poche, 1955); «*Le retour de Frère Philippe*» (The return of Friar Philip) is based on a tale by Boccacio (the new Rataillon theatre, 1959); «*Psyché malade*» (Psyche is ill) was shown at the Théâtre d'Essai in 1965. Many other works by Kinds have been broadcast by Belgian and foreign radio stations : «*Killarney philanthrope*» (Killarney the philanthropist) is the story of a

sensitive millionaire, whose relatives have a paper specially printed for him, containing nothing but good news (1958); «*Les moineaux de Baltimore*» (The sparrows of Baltimore) relates how needy students paint sparrows yellow in order to sell them as canaries (1959); «*Les Tambours d'airain*» (Bronze drums) is about the siege of Khartoum, defended by General Gordon (1964), etc... etc... Several plays by Edmond Kinds have been translated into English, German and even Slovenian.

Gérard Prévot is one of Belgium's best novelists and poets. His play, «*Le Matin capital*» (Capital morning) is in fact a long monologue of vigorous acidity and corrosive violence. He first performed it himself, at the National Theatre Festival in Spa in 1961, giving an extremely convincing performance of the only role in the play, both in the dramatic and the lighter moments. Another play by this poet of the theatre, «*La Mise à Mort*» (The killing), a new interpretation of the character of Don Juan was presented by the «Centre Dramatique de Wallonie» in 1964.

Charles-Louis Paron, who travelled so extensively in Eastern Europe and in Asia, and who wrote the well-known novel «*Zvradko le cheval*» (Zvradko the horse), used one of the episodes in this book as the basis for an extremely effective play «*Le Cheval dans la cuisine*» (The horse in the kitchen) which was presented by the «Théâtre de l'Equipe» in 1947. It describes the hard life of the peasants in the Save valley of Yugoslavia.

Last but not least, there is Paul-Alois De Bock. He is the author of the novel «*Chemins de Rome*» (Roads of Rome) and of the short story

«Terres basses» (Lowlands) which won the Rossel Prize in 1954. He is also a highly original playwright. His first play «Les Fourmis» (The Ants) — which was performed by the National Theatre in 1953 and published under the title «Les Mains dans l'vide» (Hands in a void) — is a transposition of the life and death of a man whom the writer knew well, the German Communist leader Edgard André, who was beheaded by the nazis. It is a kind of funeral hymn to a hero whose merit was not at first recognized either by his family or his entourage, but who acquired a new dimension in death. «Litanies pour les Gisants» (Litany for the Dead), staged by the «Comédie de Paris» in 1959, is a harsh portrayal of a war caused at some time in the future through the conquest of an imaginary Plateau of Pamir.

Lastly, we should mention a strong and sneering farce, «Monologue conjugal» (Conjugal monologue), which has been performed by the Antwerp Pocket Theatre. The works of Paul-Aloïs De Bock have been translated into Dutch, Polish and German.

This is where our survey ends.
What is the conclusion ?

That the theatre is doing well in Belgium. It has a large and amazingly enlightened following. Nevertheless it is still a difficult art. To overcome these difficulties, courage, enthusiasm and dedication are needed on the part of producers, actors, directors, decorators, musicians and technicians of every kind. Not to omit the playwrights.

The State too has a part to play. It does so by granting the theatre aid on a generous scale but still less than in several neighbouring countries. This, however, is a different tale... A tale which, like all good tales — and none finer than in the theatre — is bound to have a happy ending.



LUC ANDRIAM
1917. Since
joined the
company with
the Belgian
1954. For
grammatical
performances

Drame

RADIO PLAYS

«Le Chevalier d'Harmental» ; «Les Trois Mousquetaires», «Vingt ans après» and «Le Vicomte de Bragelonne» (after the series by Alexandre Dumas about the three Musketeers), in collaboration with Yvan Dauby.



TELEVISION

«L'irrésistible M. Van Tromp» (The irresistible Mr. Van Tromp) after R.L. Stevenson ; «Jane Eyre» after Charlotte Brontë ; «Le Roi Pahaut» (King Pahaut) in collaboration with Francis Domingue ; «Le Général Le Charlier».

PRINCIPAL ADAPTATIONS FOR THE THEATRE

«*The raven*» by Carlo Gozzi ; «*The mistakes of a night*» by Oliver Goldsmith ; «*The rainmaker*» by Richard Nash ; «*Harvey*» by Mary Chase ; «*Time and the Conways*» by J.B. Priestley ; «*I killed the Count*» by Alec Coppel ; «*Dear Icar !*» by Waterhouse and Hall ; «*This lady is for burning !*» by Dario Fo.

PLAYS FOR THEATRE

LUC ANDRÉ, born in Charleroi, on 30 June 1917. Studied Law at Brussels Free University. Joined the «Comédiens Routiers Belges» company when it was founded in 1935. A member of the Belgian National Theatre from 1945 to 1964. For this company he is still writing programmes and introductions for special school performances. Documentary work for the Drama Service of the Belgian Television.

APPROVED AND SUBSIDIZED THEATRES

Dutch language

Koninklijke Nederlandse Schouwburg	Comedieplein, 2000 Antwerpen	Théâtre de l'Alliance rue du Conseil 39, 1050 Bruxelles
Jeugdtheater	Vlasmarkt 28, 2000 Antwerpen	Théâtre de l'Ancre chaussée de Charleroi 90, 6060 Gilly
Reizend Volksteater	Arenbergstraat 28, 2000 Antwerpen	Théâtre de l'Art rue Bodenbroeck 22, 1000 Bruxelles
Fakkeltheater	Mutsaertstraat 4, 2000 Antwerpen	Théâtre de l'Esprit-Frappeur rue Josaphat 28, 1030 Bruxelles
E.W.T. — Randstadteater	Cogelsplein 46, 2100 Antwerpen	Théâtre de l'Etuve rue de l'Etuve 23, 4000 Liège
Mechels Miniaturtheater	O. L. Vrouwstraat 64, 2800 Mechelen	Théâtre Royal des Galeries Galerie des Princes 6, 1000 Bruxelles 4
Koninklijke Vlaamse Schouwburg	Lakensestraat 146, 1000 Brussel	Théâtre du Gymnase Place Lambert 22, 4000 Liège
Beursschouwburg	Aug. Ortsstraat 22, 1000 Brussel	Théâtre de l'Ile-St-Louis rue des Eperonniers 5, 1000 Bruxelles
Brussels Kamertoneel	Aug. Ortsstraat 22, 1000 Brussel	Théâtre Molière Square du Bastion 5, 105 Bruxelles
Waltra Teater	Arduinkaai 2-3, 1000 Brussel	Théâtre National Centre Rogier, 1000 Bruxelles
Nieuw Vlaams Toneel — Schooljeugdtheater	Groenlaan 2, 1640 St.-Genesius-Rode	Théâtre Royal du Parc rue de la Loi 3, 1000 Bruxelles
Nederlands Toneel Gent	St.-Baafsplein 7, 9000 Gent	Théâtre de Poche 1A, Chemin du Gymnase, Bois de la Cambre, 1050 Bruxelles
Arcateater	Hoogpoort 42, 9000 Gent	Théâtre de Quat'Sous Grand-Place 16, 1000 Bruxelles
Volksteater Vertikaal	Merelbekestraat 33, 9220 Merelbeke	Rideau de Bruxelles rue Ravenstein 23, 1000 Bruxelles
Nieuw Nederlands Toneel	Hofstraat 77, 9000 Gent	Théâtre des Rues rue Potagère 52A, 1030 Bruxelles no fixed address
Teater Antigone	Zwevegemstraat 7, 8500 Kortrijk	Cie Claude Volter
Korrekleider	Kraanplaats 9, 8000 Brugge	
Groot Limburgs Toneel	Lenculenstraat 31, Maastricht	

French language

Theatre de l'Alliance	rue du Conseil 39, 1050 Bruxelles
Théâtre de l'Ancre	chaussée de Charleroi 90, 6060 Gilly
Théâtre de l'Art	rue Bodenbroeck 22, 1000 Bruxelles
Théâtre de l'Esprit-Frappeur	rue Josaphat 28, 1030 Bruxelles
Théâtre de l'Etuve	rue de l'Etuve 23, 4000 Liège
Théâtre Royal des Galeries	Galerie des Princes 6, 1000 Bruxelles 4
Théâtre du Gymnase	Place Lambert 22, 4000 Liège
Théâtre de l'Ile-St-Louis	rue des Eperonniers 5, 1000 Bruxelles
Théâtre Molière	Square du Bastion 5, 105 Bruxelles
Théâtre National	Centre Rogier, 1000 Bruxelles
Théâtre Royal du Parc	rue de la Loi 3, 1000 Bruxelles
Théâtre de Poche	1A, Chemin du Gymnase, Bois de la Cambre, 1050 Bruxelles
Théâtre de Quat'Sous	Grand-Place 16, 1000 Bruxelles
Rideau de Bruxelles	rue Ravenstein 23, 1000 Bruxelles
Théâtre des Rues	rue Potagère 52A, 1030 Bruxelles no fixed address
Cie Claude Volter	

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